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The dragon unwound its tail, uprooting trees and spiraling to heaven in a terrible appeal to the gods for help

SIEGFRIED

By

EDITH HEAL

Illustrated by

MILO WINTER

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THE RADIANT HERO OF THE NORTH

LONG ago when stories were told in songs instead of books, the bards and minstrels sang of a great hero. But the minstrels were only human—some of them forgot parts of the story, others confused the names of the characters or the sequence of the events. And it was certain that each time the epic was sung, its adventures were made more glorious. Soon throughout all northern and central Europe, from the land of ice and fjords as far south as the Rhine country, this tale was made known—of a strong youth, golden-haired and beautiful, possessed of the courage that conquers all danger. Though there were countless variations of the life and deeds of the hero, the essence of his spirit was the same wherever the minstrels sang of him. He was a radiant figure among men.

In the far north, he was called Sigurd, the son of the Volsungs. In the south, he was called Siegfried. Thus the differences in the story began at the very beginning, with his name and the name of his forefathers.

Even if I had wished to take a single strong and logical version known as the true story of Siegfried, I could not have found it. Each land would have

claimed its story was the best—or the first—or the one that really happened. I knew that I must not take one interpretation and follow it alone. This would have been like listening to a single minstrel's song when others, perhaps, were chanting richer lays, further reaching, more deeply poetic. The words of every bard must be heard. Those that echoed throughout the rugged halls of Hunnish chieftains; those that rang in the courts of kings. Singers of the rough popular ballads of German country-folk. Singers of mediaeval epics with their gorgeous array of knights and ladies. I would listen to scalds tell of primitive sagas, gloomy with unearthly motives and a persistent note of fate. In the halls of Viking chieftains would be heard the strange supernatural song of Norse mythology.

From countless scenes, I would make my picture. From a gallery of figures, I would choose my characters. Here, in a distant land, many years later, I would be another minstrel singing a song, following the privilege of those story-tellers of the past who left out parts of the legend that did not ring true, who chose names that were more musical or more familiar than the discarded ones, and enriched the material wherever they could. I knew if I did this there was little danger of losing any of the original force of the story. Any epic is like a fluid—endlessly changing its form but keeping its same color and substance no matter how it is shaped anew.

Gradually the tremendous amount of material blended and melted together. It was as I had thought

—Siegfried was always there in his bright role of glory, the dominant center of every version. I had but to choose the best each poet had achieved. To the Thidreck Saga of Scandinavia for the opening scenes of the story, to the old German ballad called Siegfried of the Horny Skin for the symbol of his strength, to the justly famous Nibelungenlied of central Europe for his life at the court of the Burgundians, to the grand and ancient Volsungasaga of the north for the dragon-slaying, to the Elder Edda with its folk and fairy lore of the Norse peoples for the array of the supernatural which was to move in a kind of gloaming and blue twilight through the book.

I wanted the setting of the story to be some non-existent imaginary land that expressed the color and tenor of the epic in its entirety. Thus—there must not be cities named as they appear today on any map, and above all, the country of the Siegfried story must not be confined to any single region. So the map that appears on the inside cover of this book was drawn—with its realm called the Northlands, its Forest which the reader must believe is the greatest wood in the world, and the Rhinelands where a garden of roses blooms eternally.

Similarly, the time for the story could have no rigid limits. From the north was taken the flair of the Viking Age, with its salty atmosphere of the cold North sea, its picturesque ships with their dragon prows, its battles on the heaths. The south gave a less primitive picture of a mediaeval world where luxury

and fineness dominated. And the glamor of enchantment was sought in the realm of ancient times when gods dwelt in the heaven-mountains.

There did not need to be a well-ordered plot any more than the life of man is well-ordered. The characters walk in slow pageant-like array toward their inevitable doom. The sounding of fate is on every page. The shadow of the Wanderer who ordains all things follows Siegfried. The tree of Yggdrasil looms from the first page to the last. The curse of Andvari casts its spell.

So Siegfried goes his way, marked by destiny. Sometimes it is supernatural—his horned skin, his sword Gram, his horse Greyfell. But whether he walks with dwarfs or kings, facing the fire of a dragon's mouth or the flame of a Valkyrie's hedge, moving among mist-children or ladies of the court, there is always a human element as well. The thing that sets him apart from other epic heroes is the radiant spirit no minstrel could forget. It did not matter who sang —a bard of Saxony or a scald of Norway, the words that told of Siegfried were always brave words: "His hair was golden-red and beautiful. His eyes were so keen that few could meet their glance or peer beneath the arching brows. His shoulders were as broad as those of two men, and his body perfectly proportioned in height and breadth. And never was there fairer speech among men than that of the son of the Volsungs."

EDITH HEAL.

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THE forest lies at the world's end and so great it is that all other forests are like thin woods beside it. Where the trees grow thickest, there is gloom like the darkest night, and even where the light seeps in, the air is as heavy and blue as smoke. ¶ The roads from the world outside stop when they reach the forest, unable to pierce the wall of locked and intertwined beeches. ¶ But once past the thorny barrier, there is a smooth lane that seems to flow off into the dusk like a silver stream. The road cuts through the trunks of giant oaks that bar its path and becomes a long tunnel wide enough for a chariot and pair of horses to pass through. ¶ Farther on it narrows down to a footpath and begins to go in frenzied twistings. It passes damp marshes and caverns where dread fumes of sulphur linger in the air. Climbing a jagged rock, the bright light of day shines on it for a moment before it plunges down into a densely wooded hollow. ¶ There it leads to the heart of the gloom, where stands the greatest tree on earth, the ash of Yggdrasil—a high tree, ever green, with boughs that seem to spread over all the forest and limbs that reach to such incredible heights that men have shivered in awe, knowing the topmost branches must touch the very roof of heaven. ¶ The long leaves droop to the ground, forming a shadowy cave. Few have seen the tree, for few have dared to follow the wild road leading to it.

Chapter I

THE MEETING IN THE FOREST

STRANGELY—at this moment—two figures journey toward the ash from opposite ends of the great forest.

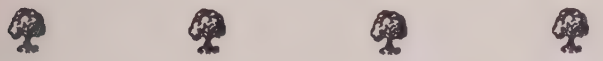
One is the hunched dwarf Mimir, who lives at the foot of the ash in a rocky grotto. Within the cave is an immense forge made out of natural rock. The fire from the forge burns like a fire beneath a witch's cauldron and tales have been told of the marvels that have been wrought on Mimir's anvil. Of the dwarf—little is known. He is said to possess the greatest knowledge among men, because he is master of the Well of Urd, a mysterious well of wisdom that lies at the foot of Yggdrasil's ash. Mimir's life is spent in the rocky grotto huddled over the scorching fires, as he burns the charcoal for his smithy. Sometimes he goes forth to the world that lies beyond the forest, but what his errands are no one can tell. That they are dark and unworthy, is certain. And yet this gnarled little figure has dined at the council halls of kings and has been summoned to teach the sons of kings everything from the writing of runes to the forging of a sword.

Now he is making his way back to his smithy in the forest. He scurries through the dark tunnels

carved out of living trees. His curled shoes carry him from arch to arch in a series of scamperings and rushes. He has journeyed for many days and is in the state of terror that can only be felt by a dwarf. There are men who are afraid of their own thoughts, but surely none who jump at the sound of their own footsteps and cry aloud when their breathing startles them. Thus Mimir goes, his large head twisting anxiously from side to side. And his thoughts are fearful things as he mutters: "Fool that you are, Mimir—to ever travel this poisonous wood. Better the 'Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum' of the giants than such unearthly quiet."

He travels by night as well as day, for he is like a hunted thing afraid to rest. At last he enters that part of the forest where he is more at home. His eyes mark this boulder and that ledge as well-remembered signs. There is only one more ridge to climb before he will enter the glades that are shadowed by the branches of the great ash. He starts up the sharp incline in high spirits, but the sudden scream of some distant wild thing bring him to a trembling standstill. Everything is quiet again. He glances nervously about, and starts on. Then all at once the forest is alive with hidden chatterings. Ah—Mimir recognizes them. The wood creatures who scorn his fear are welcoming him back with taunts and raillery. The hunched dwarf begins to run through the winding corridors of trees like a swift earthy little beast while mischievous squirrels pelt him with twigs and nuts. Mimir puts his long bony fingers into his big ears that he may not hear the

hissing, snarling animals as he flies on toward the refuge that lies beyond the hill.



In another part of the forest, the birds sing and the air is filled with a fragrance rich and strange. There is a pleasant quiet and a drowsy languor. The late afternoon sun sends spears of golden light into the glades. Against the quiet, the sound of the wild creatures is vivid and sharp. The squeal of a baby boar who is hungry—the gruff barking of the lively foxes—and high in the hidden branches, the nameless cooing and calling of the winged ones. Suddenly a startling sound emerges from these voices that belong to the forest—the loud merry laughter of a child.

Days pass, and nearer and nearer the ash tree, the child's laughter is heard. Sometimes it is accompanied by a chorus of singing birds; at other times by a low growling as gentle as a kitten's purr. And so the time comes when the two who journey toward the heart of the forest stand at opposite ends of the glade beneath Yggdrasil's ash, in sight of the tree but hidden from each other by the foliage.

This is the moment Mimir has dreamed of for many days. This is the moment of bravery for Mimir—since nothing can harm him within sight of his home. The dwarf lifts his hunched shoulders and tries to stalk toward his grotto as he once saw a warrior march into battle. He remembers the words sung by a wandering

scald to describe a mighty hero. "Head high—eyes to the stars." That is how Mimir will go. He points the sparse straggly hair of his beard to the sky, and his neck stretches out like the stem of an ugly toadstool. Ha-ha—a fine fellow, Mimir, with a brave heart!

And then the unbelievable sound reached his ears—a peal of gentle human laughter that had no place in the forest. Mimir's start of terror sent him off his balance to a bed on the hard earth. What new magic this? Who comes with courage to laugh in this dark wood? Mimir lies, whimpering and shivering while the forest is alive with his chorus of mocking neighbors. "Mi-mi-mi-rrrrrrrrrr," the birds sing; "Cow-cow-cow-rrrrrrrrrrd", they seem to cry.

Again the laughter, joyous and beautiful, echoes across the glade. There is the sound of light steps running over dry leaves, and a final shout of pure glee. At first, Mimir thinks that he cannot lift his head to see what miracle this is. Nay—he would rather die here in a cold heap than face this elusive one who comes where no human has ever come before.

But something stirred in Mimir's soul. He who had felt nothing for so long save fear and terror, felt now a searching curiosity. Half willingly, he lifted his bowed head and shook the matted hair from his eyes. He looked into the blue haze that lay before him and marveled at what he saw. There, holding to the branch of a thorny bush, stood a naked boy, regarding him with laughing, curious eyes. The child seemed bathed in the one shaft of sunlight in the whole

dark glade. He looked like a child who had lived in the sun always. His skin was ruddy brown and his wild mass of curls was the color of deep gold.

Before the dwarf could find his voice to speak, he was again terrified into silence. From the shadows behind the child three romping bear-cubs came tumbling. Mimir saw them and raced like a mad thing for the nearest tree trunk. The bark tore his skin, and his veins stood out like cords as he climbed, but the growl of the baby bears spurred him on. He had no thought for the child he had left in danger. Not until he was safe on a high branch, hidden by leaves, did he dare to peer down at the scene below.

The three cubs chased about. They tossed the naked boy to each other like a ball, and the child's shouts of glee were the cries of a child having an exciting play. At last they rolled—the four of them—over and over on the mossy earth, hot and exhausted.

Mimir watched the merrymakers as they lumbered out of sight. He longed to call to this strange intruder, but he dared not bring the child back lest the bears come also. Besides, Mimir had learned patience. He knew the Well of Urd would tell him all he wished to learn of the boy who had appeared so mysteriously in the forest. In the loneliness of night, he would search the dark waters of wisdom to find out what manner of child this was—what his name might be—how he had come to the wood. Certainly, if the sturdy beautiful boy were not born of the gods, he had sprung from the mightiest of men.

The dwarf slid down the trunk to earth. Bleeding and weary, he turned his eyes once more toward the ash tree looming above the forest. The last glimmer of daylight vanished as he entered the dusky grove he had been seeking. He shivered with excitement, for as often as Mimir saw the tree of Yggdrasil, he was still awed by the mysteries surrounding it. He drew near the Well of Urd. Its dark oily waters thrilled him. In their depths lay the wisdom of the world. And the wisdom was Mimir's for the reading. He dropped a leaf into the well and watched the enchanted waters coat it with a strange white film. He saw the two white swans that belonged to the waters, even as he did, floating there like petals fallen from some great flower.

Mimir danced in the grotto. He laughed happily at the sight of the creatures dwelling in the limbs of Yggdrasil's ash. These were the only creatures he did not fear: the black eagle sitting on the first cross-bough; the watchful hawk, Vedrfolnir, perched between the eagle's eyes; the impudent squirrel, Ratatosk, scampering up and down the furrowed trunk carrying words of envy between the eagle and Nidhog, a horrid worm dwelling beneath the roots.

While in the hall beneath the trunk of the ash sat the three Norns spinning the threads of fate. Urd, the Past; Verdandi, the Present; Sculd, the Future, were they called and they were governed by no god, nor by Odin himself. They shaped the destinies of all men and the issues of life and death were in their

hands. Hovering there they listened to the voice of Mimir as they went on spinning an eternal doom.

Yes,—later he would begin again his endless task of burning charcoal for the smithy. Later he would read the waters of wisdom. Now he must welcome his friends in the grotto.

Mimir held out his skeleton hands to them and squeaked a greeting. But the eagle stared on through the gloom, and the squirrel Ratatosk did not even stop in his scamperings to turn and answer him.

Chapter II SIEGFRIED

MIMIR hurried over his tasks. The fires of charcoal were soon burning and the grotto near the ash tree glowed in the dusk like the mouth of a dragon. The dark little figure of the dwarf moved backward and forward in the red light. Those who watched saw him brew a steaming broth and drink it greedily. After a while he came out into the glade, and in the half-light of evening he was like some growth of the forest, grey and twisted and still.

Never was the forest so alive with voices as in the long twilight before nightfall. The animals knew that this was their last chance to frolic and chatter until another day, for when blackness descended over the woods the wild ones crept into their holes and slept.

Tonight the hidden voices had a new note. Mimir had come home, and the whisperers in the forest asked of one another: "What is he up to now—what new mischief has he planned?"

News of the strange meeting between the dwarf and the child that the forest had harbored safely for many months spread into the farthest regions of the great wood. The creatures that had always mocked at Mimir came now to spy softly upon him. Through the grey

aisles bathed in dusk, lumbered herds of ugly beasts. Nearer and nearer the glade sounded the procession of padded feet. The bears, who had played with the boy as if he were one of their own cubs, came. And swiftly through the thickets sprang the lovely hind who had found the baby crying in the forest and had taken him home to live with her own fawns. The whole world of animals moved toward the ash of Yggdrasil and Mimir's home. Dumbly and blindly they came, for they knew not what Mimir might do to the child. But two things kept them from entering the glade itself—the flame of Mimir's fires and the magic waters of the Well of Urd.

And so, when the hunched figure of the dwarf approached at last the Well of Wisdom, hundreds of eyes watched him. The birds and the beasts hid in the great branches of Yggdrasil. They crouched behind the thorny bushes that bordered the opening beneath the tree. From every thicket they peered at Mimir.

Breathlessly Mimir watched the waters of his well recoil and whirl, and the forest creatures watched with him. But all they saw was the dark slippery hole in the center of the pool where the water was sucked down and the two white swans floating aimlessly like fallen petals. The wisdom in the well was kept for the dwarf who owned it.

Now before the eyes of all who had mocked at him, Mimir seemed to expand and grow. Standing at the edge of the dark waters, his malignant figure was transformed into a swaying, gesticulating menace.

All the cohorts of wild things shrank back further into the thickets—bewildered and fearful. Mimir—whom they had always frightened—had become a power to frighten them. And the only animals who dared to jeer at the dwarf were Ratatosk and the worm, Nidhog.

"What wisdom do you seek, water demon? Is it that your head is empty again of sense and must be stocked up like a bare cupboard?" mocked the squirrel from the branches of Yggdrasil's ash.

"Nay—he seeks but his own reflection—the beautiful gnome," chuckled Nidhog.

"A-ha!—a new Narcissus searching for his golden image in every pool!"

Mimir did not even lift his flashing eyes nor turn to rail at them for their sneers. Somewhere in that dark undulating well lay the secret of the mysterious child who roamed the forest without fear. Once the truth were learned, the dwarf would hold the intruder in his power.

Suddenly the waters of the well began to hiss and boil. A strange light covered Mimir, and the animals shrank back into the bushes when they saw this. Muttering to himself, the dwarf leaned over the well and watched the living waters stir. From time to time he cried out—"Ha—then this is he! This is the child—and so he lives—and such shall be his end!"

And those animals who for days had hidden the lost child in their caves that Mimir might not find him, drew together in their anxiety and growled their distress. They, who had taught him the language of

beasts, cried forth their warnings to him now in that same language.

"Little wandering one—stay away from this ugly gnome and his magic well."

"Hide away—hide away. Let your feet that make no noise go cautiously, your eyes that see in the dark, watch closely. Your ears that hear the very passing of the wind must guard you now from this evil one who is calling."

But the magic of the well was stronger than the will of the whole animal kingdom. All at once a white flame leaped from the waters and a voice like a bell was heard:

"Siegfried is the name of the child—and only Mimir shall know him."

And as Mimir stood, a triumphant figure—listening—Siegfried came running toward him from the thickets. In the light of the white flame the boy stood, all naked—tossing the shining curls from his bewildered eyes. His mouth was smiling—for even though his body shook with excitement, there was no fear in his heart and he had learned that he must never cry. He faced the dwarf bravely.

"Ah—a handsome one," crooned Mimir, holding out his thin arms to the child.

Then those forest creatures who lay hidden cried aloud in protest. Siegfried was their own—nourished by them—raised by them. He must not go to Mimir. But none of them dared to rush into the glade, for the fire and the well frightened them.

Again Mimir spoke—cajoling and pleading. So clever he was that for a moment the child wavered toward him, misled by the dwarf's crafty attempts to be kind.

"Speak to me, Siegfried—that we may be friends," said Mimir.

The boy laughed gleefully and vaulted high into the air. The words of the dwarf amused him, for he did not understand the language of men. He mocked this strange speech, and Mimir saw that the child was like a wild little cub that knew only the speech of the wild things.

He must be treated like a wild thing then. The dwarf ran into his grotto where the red charcoal fires burned. Seizing a blazing branch, he rushed toward Siegfried. The boy stood unflinchingly, his lips firmly pressed together. But now the cry of the beasts rose to a mighty wailing and snarling. And forth from the dark woods bounded the slim and beautiful hind who had mothered Siegfried. Straight toward the fire that she feared the hind ran. She knelt at the feet of the boy and licked him and tried to push him back into the safe groves of the forest.

Even Mimir stopped for a moment, the blazing branch still in his hands. How great the love must be that Siegfried had called forth from the animals. The hind—most sensitive and timid of all the forest creatures—had dared to face the fire, the well, and Mimir with his weapon, that she might save Siegfried from harm.

Mimir lifted his blazing branch and waved it before the gentle eyes of the beast

The dim shapes at the border of the glade quivered and the leaves of the thickets were stirred as the animals watched the strange picture. They saw Siegfried push the hind gently away. They heard him cry in the language they had taught him:

"Everything is fine—everything is all right. What a weak one I would be if I ran away from this little dwarf. Let me stay—and at night I will come to your caves and tell you all that I have learned. We will know the truth about Mimir."

The hind sprang toward Siegfried again in a frenzy of anxiety. Mimir lifted his blazing branch and waved it before the gentle eyes of the beast, but Siegfried snatched the fiery torch away in a storm of passion. At last—with a soft whimper—the hind bounded back into the dark woods—and the voices of the animals greeted her in a murmurous chorus.

When night fell, the procession of beasts moved slowly away. The sound of their feet was like low thunder for they had forgotten caution in their sorrow at losing Siegfried. For a long time they mourned him in a high singsong whine, and never was the forest so terrible as that night when Siegfried went to Mimir.

Back in the glade, the dwarf and the boy faced each other curiously. Mimir lifted the child to his lap and stroked his silky hair. He tried to rock backward and forward on the stump in a vain attempt to mother Siegfried. But the boy, instead of acting the part of a babe, kicked the rough stump with his strong heel,

wriggled from Mimir's arms, and rolled over and over on the ground shouting with merriment.

Mimir sat on the stump and sulked. It was useless for him to try to catch Siegfried. Every time the dwarf approached, the boy would run away. Flinging himself along the branches of a tree, he would hang carelessly upside down and swing over Mimir's head. As the swaying branches cracked, the fearful dwarf would scurry to a place of safety, only to feel his new shelter creaking above his head when the swift-moving Siegfried appeared once more above him. This mad play went on for a long time, until Mimir was worn out with rage and weariness.

All at once the boy became submissive. He approached the dwarf, half-shyly, and allowed Mimir to dress him in a woolly goatskin. He began to repeat words that the dwarf used, and Mimir saw that he was learning the speech of men with amazing quickness. It was not for nothing that Siegfried had learned to imitate the fawns he had been raised with and the bears that had been his playmates. He found that Mimir's speech was far easier than the language of the beasts, and on that first night with the dwarf he learned the names of many things.

Once he leaped upon Mimir and began to tussle with him as he had tussled with the baby bears. But Mimir proved no playmate—the dwarf went down before Siegfried's strong hands like the tenderest of saplings. And Siegfried saw that though he had been the weakest of all the animals—he was perhaps to be the strongest

among this new kind of being. The thought filled him with pride and excitement and he rushed about the glade with his brown arms flung high and his red-gold curls tossing.

At last, Mimir was able to put him to bed in a corner of the grotto, and the boy slept with only a passing thought for the animals he had left. Life had opened new doors for him that night, and excitement in Siegfried's heart left no room for loneliness. Mimir did not sleep. He paced the rocky floor, and from time to time he stopped to peer with greedy eyes at the strong and beautiful child. In the dwarf's mind dark thoughts were brooding—and already Siegfried was a part of them.

Chapter III

MIMIR'S TEACHINGS

AT DAWN Siegfried awoke. He was conscious of something hot and heavy lying over him and instinctively his hands pushed it away. The cover had the hairy touch of an animal's skin, but there was no animal inside it. The boy sat up with a start. Where was he? What had happened to him? He knew by the strange blue haze that he was in a cavern of some kind. But it was not the familiar cave where the bears slept. Faintly the sounds of waking birds and beasts caught his ear—quails, nightingales and thrushes were calling; the she-wolf snarled at her young. Why was he not with them? What had led him to sleep in a damp cave instead of under the sky?

A stirring near him, aroused the boy to caution. Noiselessly he crouched, ready to spring as the beasts had taught him to do in time of danger. The sound came again—the rattling of pots and a low grumble. At the same moment the terrifying gleam of fire lit the rocky walls of the cavern. In a flash Siegfried saw and remembered where he was. This was the home of Mimir the dwarf. That bent figure with a peak of hair like a horn was Mimir himself. Siegfried felt a wild impatience to be free. Watching the dwarf to

see that he did not turn and discover him, the boy crept silently from the cavern.

Outside there was a faint mist and a cool greyness covered the woods. The dew was so heavy it lay like pools from a recent rain, and the air smelled moist and earthy. Siegfried's feet sped over the wet spongy moss as he dashed from the grotto into the safety of the deep thickets.

A hundred voices greeted him. From hidden places came the animals who had waited all night for Siegfried. The fawns that were Siegfried's brothers leaped toward him. They licked him and rubbed against him. They welcomed him as if he had been far away from them and gone for many days instead of across a single night.

Siegfried felt a strange impatience at the nervousness of the fawns. He could not understand his anger and he was ashamed.

"Let us run far away so that Mimir cannot catch you again," said the loving hind who had mothered him. "Climb on my back, for you cannot travel as swiftly on foot," she said.

But Siegfried felt as if he were rooted to the ground. His thoughts kept going back to that picture in the cavern—an ugly dwarf bending over his pots.

"What does Mimir do at night?" questioned the eager cubs.

"He sleeps," said Siegfried.

"Even as we do?" There was disappointment in the sound of their voices. They had visioned the

dwarf working his ways of enchantment after the night fell.

"Let us hurry off," pleaded the gentle hind, interrupting their chatter.

But Siegfried could not answer her, and made no move to follow her. He was confused and bewildered by his own thoughts. Why had he run away from Mimir's cave if not to return to the animals who were his friends? And yet—now that he was here he did not want to stay.

All at once the animals seemed to sense that something was wrong. They stood like statues staring at Siegfried, and he could not meet their eyes. They questioned him mutely—and he did not want to answer. Perhaps the beasts understood, or perhaps they were too deeply hurt and dismayed to ask more of the boy that they loved. Slowly they turned from him and he heard only a soft sighing as they disappeared in the thick woods.

For a long time, Siegfried stood where they had left him. He thought of Mimir. Mimir whom he had watched scuttle through the trees. Mimir whom he had been warned against ever since he could remember. Often he had pelted the dwarf with acorns from some tall oak—but never had he met the gnome face to face until that day when Mimir returned from the journey outside the woods. What was this wish to know the dwarf and stay with him in a damp cave? Siegfried puzzled over the problem and he was unhappy because he did not understand it and there was no one to

help him. He decided at last to call upon the animals and ask them to explain this unfamiliar thing.

He tossed his golden head as if to throw off the thoughts that worried him, and pursed his lips for the long call that the animals knew him by. Gayly he shouted—and waited for an answer. There was only the faint rustling of leaves in the trees. He called again—but once more there was no answer. Siegfried began to run toward the darkest part of the forest. He did not know where he was going. He called anxiously every few paces and rushed on. Something like panic filled him as the silence persisted. He forgot the training of all his years in the forest, and crashed noisily through the thickets. He ran as a boy and not as the child who had been reared with the delicate fawns. He reached the lowest hollow in the woods. It was a wild marshy spot with bushes like twisted snakes and thin trees that seemed to be lifting frantic hands to the sky. Siegfried stood with his eyes piercing the gloom and his ears alert for any sound. As he waited, with every part of him straining for some signal from the wild things, a loud song burst upon his ears. Even as he rejoiced—he was plunged again into bewilderment. This song of a bird had suddenly become a song without meaning to his ears. The caroling rose to a mocking lilt and was still and Siegfried knew not what the bird had sung.

What had he lost? He had chosen to stay with Mimir—and he could not have the animals as well. Then Siegfried knew that he wanted the fawns and the

cubs—the wild boars and the mischievous foxes—all the beasts of the forest. But, though he chased like a streak of light after the animals he had abandoned, he could not find them. Sometimes he thought he heard a growling or purring. There was a rustle among the bushes. There was a sound in a cave. But wherever he searched, he found nothing.

At last the boy flung himself down on the ground. He knew now that what he had loved best was gone from him. All that day Siegfried wandered alone in the forest. Sometimes he heard the voices of the animals and they were the voices of strangers. By nightfall, he had decided to return to Mimir's cave. He would leave the forest and go out into the world beyond it. Only Mimir could show him the way.

Back then—to that rocky cavern. Back to the tree of Yggdrasil and the Well of Wisdom. Siegfried walked toward them slowly. It was the middle of the night before he reached the glade. Scrambling up the trunk of the great ash, the boy slept in the crook of a bough until morning.

He awoke to hear a loud groaning and sighing coming from Mimir's cave. It was the dwarf coming to life for the day.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho-Hmmmmmm-Shuuuuuu," yawned the dwarf.

Siegfried stayed hidden in the leaves of Yggdrasil's ash. After awhile Mimir came out of the cave, shivering and rheumy-eyed. He was muttering to himself.

"Where did he go to? How did he get away? He

was mine, and now he has run away and I will never find him again. How can I search for him in the forest?" the dwarf ended with a moan.

As Siegfried sat there, wondering how to attract Mimir's attention, Ratatosk came scampering up the trunk of the tree with the dwarf's curled shoe in his mouth. Siegfried took the shoe and dropped it with a loud splash into Mimir's well.

"You bushy-tailed monkey," shrieked Mimir, "wait until I catch you. I'll bury your hoard of nuts in the bottomless depths of the well to keep company with my shoe."

"What are you talking about—I have not seen your shoe," said Ratatosk, peering down at the furious dwarf.

"Who else, then, but you?" cried Mimir.

As a direct answer to his question, Siegfried jumped from the tree and landed lightly at Mimir's feet. The dwarf stopped his complaint and stared wonderingly at the boy. He rubbed his eyes still full of sleep and stared again. Uttering a squeal of joy, he ran toward Siegfried with outstretched arms. But the boy shook him off as if he could not bear the touch of his cold hands.

For several days the two watched each other cautiously. Sometimes Siegfried stared out into the dark woods as if he wondered what was happening there. Mimir listened for some sound of the animals and watched fearfully for their coming. But nothing disturbed the peacefulness of the glade.

Gradually Siegfried began to repeat words after Mimir, and soon they could speak together, for the mind of the boy was eager and Mimir was known as the most patient teacher of the northlands. The boy's curiosity was boundless and soon Mimir began to train him in all ways, as if he were the child of a court instead of a half-tamed foundling of the forest.

"Siegfried—every son of a king or a chieftain learns to excel in sports," said Mimir.

"And am I the son of a king?" Siegfried asked idly.

Mimir caught his breath with fear. This was the one thing that Siegfried must not know. The cunning dwarf pretended the question had never been asked.

"You must learn to swim," he said.

"And what, then, is 'to swim'?" Siegfried demanded.

Mimir, who feared the water almost as much as he feared the forest, led Siegfried timidly to the banks of the mighty river. The waters were cold and black and the river was filled with dangerous shoals. The stream was like a part of the faraway sea into which it flowed. Here on the bare clay banks Mimir told Siegfried of swimming.

"There are certain exercises that all young men who are to live in glory must know," said Mimir, "and they are called 'idrottir.' Swimming is one of the most important. Should the day come when you are old enough to sail the seas, you most certainly will battle on the water. There is great danger of your falling overboard, and your only chance to live is to keep above the water."

"But the fish live and they do not keep above the water," said Siegfried.

"That is different," Mimir answered crossly, "to breath the water is to die, you had better remember that. There are men who can swim for leagues with their heavy armor on, and there are even men who can stand in the water with a companion on their shoulders. These things you must learn to do, for if ever we are thrown in the water together, Siegfried, you must be able to rescue your master as well as yourself."

Siegfried listened to this long lecture with a smile on his lips. Then he turned to Mimir and said, "You jump into the stream, Mimir—for I do not at all understand what you mean by this talk of swimming. Let me see you glide in the water as the fish does."

"Nay—nay—the only way to learn a thing is to plunge into it yourself," said Mimir hurriedly.

But Siegfried pretended he did not know what Mimir meant by swimming, until at last the dwarf was forced to lie down cautiously on the bank of the river and show him the motions of keeping afloat.

"Go this way with your arms—and the opposite way with your legs," murmured Mimir with his nose scraping the wet clay.

"Oh I see—like a slimy toad," laughed Siegfried as he watched the vain efforts of the dwarf.

"Nay—like a fish," said Mimir.

With that Siegfried laughed scornfully. "And what do you know of the fish, stupid dwarf. Come and I will show you a fish at close quarters."

With a swift movement Siegfried tumbled Mimir from the side of the bank into the rushing waters. The dwarf sank like a heavy stone. Then Siegfried plunged in himself, and when Mimir came to the surface choking and sputtering and green with terror, Siegfried was beside him to reach out and grasp him. For a while the boy played with the dwarf—now thrusting him under the whirling waters—now lifting him up so that air could once more find its way into Mimir's water-logged lungs. Finally he carried the quaking dwarf across the dark water to the opposite bank, crying: "Take note, master—watch! Is this what you call swimming?" Siegfried dumped his burden on the wet clay and dived joyously back into the stream again.

Mimir, utterly exhausted, propped open one puffy eye with his finger. He saw Siegfried lying on the water with his arms folded beneath his head. The boy might have been lying on the sturdy foundations of the earth. He was chatting to Mimir as casually as if he stood beside him on dry land.

"After I have rested I will summon a salmon or pike and we will race for you, silly dwarf. You who have told me all about swimming as if you know more of it than I know—bah!—we will show you what swimming can really be."

"Take me back," said Mimir fretfully. "How can I ever reach my grotto again? There is no bridge over the stream. There is no way to get across."

"Swim across, to be sure," teased Siegfried.

Siegfried floated down the stream with the current and Mimir was forced to stir his weary body and run along the bank to keep up with him. It was a strange spectacle—the boy drifting as easily as a leaf on the surface of the water, and Mimir staggering along the wet and slippery bank.

Suddenly Siegfried felt the pull of the current stronger than before and he knew that he was approaching the rapids of the river, dangerously full of shoals and swift whirlpools. He turned over and began to swim upstream again. He had buried his face in the water and had begun to plunge ahead, his arms churning a foam like the white mane of a galloping horse—when he heard a piercing scream from Mimir. Lifting his head, he saw a fish of incredible size coming toward him from the shoals. It was twice as large as Siegfried and the biggest fish the boy had ever seen. It was round and thick, with shining fins on its back and a horizontal tail that slashed the waves. From time to time a stream of water spouted from it like the slender jet of a fountain. Siegfried knew that the race he had boasted he would swim had turned into a race for his life. This fish he did not recognize —perhaps it was a porpoise that had made its way up from the sea. He had heard tell of them. Whatever the fish—it meant no good here.

Mimir covered his face with his hands and peered between his fingers at the wild scene. With a clamor of waters the monstrous fish charged up the stream. But ahead of him—spurting like a streak of light—was

the shining body of Siegfried. The boy was making for the high rock that jutted up from the middle of the stream. If he tried to turn in toward the banks of the river, he knew that the porpoise would soon overtake him.

The race was over in a moment. As Siegfried shot himself up from the water and caught a ledge of the rock, the fish spouted furiously and struck the water with his tail so that the splash reached the shore and nearly drowned Mimir. From the top of the rock Siegfried looked down upon the great creature.

"Well, you have seen me race with a fish, Mimir. Do you think you will ever try to teach me to swim again?"

"What a fish," breathed Mimir, leaning forward intently to study the shape of the freakish monster. "It must be a porpoise that has come up from the sea —rarely have they ventured into rivers, but I have read in the writings of learned men that occasionally they have been seen."

"I shall have to jump to the bank," said Siegfried measuring the distance with his eye.

"Nay, nay—you will fall in and you have no longer the strength to outrace the fish," cried Mimir.

"Why should I fall," laughed Siegfried, "have you not yourself told me stories of men who have jumped chasms thirty feet across. Watch me, Mimir, and you will have another story to tell."

The dwarf caught his breath as he saw Siegfried crouch with his arms outstretched in front of him.

The fish spouted furiously and struck the water with his tail so that the splash nearly drowned Mimir

Backward and then forward again he swung them, as he gave a mighty spring through the air. He landed lightly on his two feet, a safe distance from the river.

After a while the porpoise swam downstream again. He was off to the sea once more—perhaps with a strange story to tell to the fishes that swam in the deep. And Siegfried crossed the stream for the second time with Mimir upon his strong shoulders—a chastened Mimir who wondered at the skill of the boy.

After that Mimir contented himself with the telling of great feats of strength rather than the teaching of them. He plundered the sagas of olden times for examples of great deeds. And Siegfried listened to stories of Ragnar Lodbrok, Hjalmar, Orvar Odd and others.

One day the boy heard of Harald Gilli, dark-skinned and tall, the fleetest runner of the age. Mimir told how Harald raced with a horse to victory:

"They galloped off and Harald followed the whole way at the shoulder of the horse and when they came to the end of the course men said of him that he had held to the strap of the saddle girth and that the horse had pulled him along."

"And was this true?" asked Siegfried with shining eyes.

"No—it was not true, but again Harald raced that he might prove it," said Mimir, "and again he won and this time those who watched said he had started before his horse."

"That wouldn't be a fair race," cried Siegfried.

"Patience, boy—those who watched had lied. Harald had not started ahead of the animal, but again he wished to prove it. For the third time he raced, and now someone mounted the horse and started to gallop it. After the horse had gone several paces, they called to Harald to run. And even this time he won, outrunning the horse that was so far in front of him at the start."

"And that is how I must run," said the boy.

"Yes, Siegfried—and you must be able to ride also, for there are times when a horse can run further than a man and there are distances that you will travel in your life that even one horse cannot travel unless he is a beast of great power."

Later that day Mimir came upon Siegfried in a vast meadow that lay between two groves in the forest. Here a herd of deer were resting. Mimir reached the field just in time to see Siegfried chasing the wildest buck of all the herd. As the animal reared and plunged, the boy seized him by the horns and drew himself over the beast's head—somersaulting to an upright position on its back. There he sat, erect and laughing, one hand holding to the buck—the other waving to Mimir. The buck, unable to throw off his unwelcome rider, crashed through the brush to the road that ran past the meadow. Siegfried and his wild steed passed the cringing dwarf like the rushing onslaught of a storm cloud. Mimir heard the hoofs thunder on the smooth road and it was not until many hours later that he heard the thundering hoofs again.

Siegfried had tired out the wild buck, and he had brought him back to the grove, a submissive and beaten thing.

"He is worth nothing, Mimir. He is wearied after a little while. I must have a horse that will travel fleetly and tirelessly for many days at a time. Where can I find one? Where are the horses to be found that the warriors of your sagas ride?"

"Out in the world, Siegfried, at the court of great kings and chieftains. Only fine men possess fine horses."

"But if I am to become a fine man, I must have a fine horse," said Siegfried impatiently.

Mimir nodded his head in agreement, "Yes," he said, "be patient—you too will have a fine horse some day."

And soon Mimir saw that Siegfried needed no training in most of the idrottir that the young men of the north had to learn. The boy jumped like a wild cat —he ran like a fawn—he climbed like a squirrel—he swam like a fish—he wrestled like a young cub. Living with the animals had taught him to see so keenly that the shooting of arrows was play for him. When he threw the spear, Mimir saw that he was as strong at his time of life as a warrior in his years of greatest strength. Above all Siegfried possessed the courage of one who has never known fear—and this was the gift that Mimir cherished in him beyond anything else.

Chapter IV

SIEGFRIED IS TOLD OF A QUEST

NOW began days of work and study. No longer did Siegfried race and swim and play through all his waking hours. Mimir was a stern teacher and a hard taskmaster. Together they spent many hours in the smithy. The dwarf darted back and forth between the anvil and the forge, while Siegfried worked the great bellows until the flames leaped higher than himself. The boy loved the clang of the hammer on the anvil, and longed for that moment to come when the red sparks showered like chips from some heavenly meteor. Sometimes Mimir rushed from the cave to plunge a white-hot rod into the cool waters of the Well of Urd, and great waves of steam came hissing forth so that Nidhog the worm crawled into his hole and Ratatosk ran screaming up the ash.

Mimir told Siegfried much of the craft of forging—but some things he withheld because he was jealous of his craft and did not wish anyone to equal him. The dwarf was clever enough to quote the good and none of the evil that men said of his kind. He did not speak of those who said scornfully that a smith loved wealth rather than birth and considered money as great as forefathers. He told rather of a fine old man of the

northlands called Starkad who had said of smiths: "I judge those best who weld warrior's swords and spears for the battle."

"Ah, but Mimir—would not the welding of beautiful things made out of gold be nobler?" said the young boy, "goblets and bracelets and splendid rings—"

"Fie, Siegfried—do you not know that gold is the softest of metals and the easiest to cast. Starkad condemns those who make things from it, saying that their hands are crushed with cowardice even though they may be skillful."

Then Siegfried hung his head in shame and he longed fiercely to know more than this ugly dwarf, so that he need not always learn from him.

"Is then the steel of a sword a harder thing to work with?" asked the boy.

"The blade of the sword is the hardest thing in the world to forge," said Mimir, "for when it is done its strength is the strength of its maker. The temper of the blade shows the courage and the power of the hands that created it. And every smith on earth desires above all things to turn forth a sword from his anvil that is like ice and fire."

"And when, Mimir, may I learn to forge such a sword?" cried Siegfried.

"Who are you to talk of swords," scoffed Mimir, "when you still think that gold is a worthy metal? Bestir yourself—fan the fire,—sweep the hearth clean of wood; scatter the fine ashes; rouse the fallen

embers; draw out the smothered blaze," taunted the dwarf.

Siegfried pressed his lips together and was silent, but his heart was stormy and he was impatient that Mimir knew more than himself.

At night by the flickering fire Mimir changed from an ugly dwarf to a singer of songs. He played upon a harp, and it was no wonder that the boy sat spellbound. Mimir had played these same songs in the council halls of mighty chieftains. So great was his talent that he had swayed the feelings of all who listened to passions they had never dreamed they possessed. He had filled their hearts with hatred as well as pity, with harshness as well as love. Thus he played to Siegfried, and when he was through he handed the harp to the boy.

"How can I play it, Mimir—how can I make it speak as you do?" Siegfried cried with flaming cheeks.

But Mimir was like an empty shell—drained of everything that he had given to the music. So Siegfried's fingers fumbled without being told where to go—and yet he played with fire and with feeling, for the sound of Mimir's playing was still singing in his ears.

Mimir taught the boy the reading of runes, which are mystic writings carved on rocks or weapons or bones. This was so great a task that Siegfried hated it as a boy hates the study of books in the schoolroom.

"Of course it is hard," Mimir told him, "it is said that even the great Odin learned his runes weeping."

"Weeping," scoffed Siegfried, "that I shall never do—" and he plunged anew into the bewildering tracings.

Mimir asked him the riddles that had puzzled the minds of the wisest men—and Siegfried laughed with delight when he heard the answers, and soon he began to guess some of them himself.

"Listen, Siegfried, to this one," said Mimir:

"Who lives on high mountains?
Who lives in deep dales?
Who lives without breath?
Who is never silent?"

"Ah—but I do not know, Mimir," said Siegfried impatiently—"tell me, Mimir—tell me the answers."

"I will tell you the first two and you must tell me the last," Mimir replied.

"Ravens live on high mountains;
Dew falls in deep dales."

Siegfried's cheeks were scarlet and his eyes bright. What could be the answer to Mimir's riddle? He thought hard. At last he said shyly, "I think I can tell the third, Mimir—but the fourth one I shall have to give up."

"Well—try the third one then," said Mimir, for he was a patient teacher and knew that the boy must not be discouraged.

"Fish live without breath in water," cried Siegfried eagerly.

"That is right," said Mimir proudly, "and the sounding waterfall is never silent."

"But of course," sighed the boy, "why couldn't I have guessed that?"

And now Mimir gave him harder riddles that he could not answer at all. But the boy was delighted with the answers and soon riddle-making became his favorite game, as it was the favorite pastime of the northmen during the long dark winter when they spent so many hours indoors.

"Try this one, Siegfried."

"I went from home,
I traveled from home,
I looked on the road of roads,
Road was above,
Road was beneath
And road in every direction."

This was indeed a marvelous riddle. Siegfried was so impatient for its answer that Mimir told it to him:

"A bird flew above,
A fish swam beneath,
I walked on a bridge."

"M-mimir," stuttered the boy in his excitement, "has anyone ever guessed a riddle as hard as that one?"

"I have heard that same riddle guessed many times," smiled Mimir, "and once a rich king offered a trading ship to the man who could make up another as clever."

"And did anyone succeed?" cried Siegfried.

"Listen—and you shall hear the one that was found to be even better," said Mimir.

"Who are those two
That have three eyes both?"

Again Siegfried wrestled with a riddle too hard for him. Again he stamped his foot with impatience and begged for the answer.

"It is Odin riding along on Sleipnir; he has one eye and his horse has two," said Mimir.

"Oh—!" exclaimed Siegfried, "why has Odin only one eye, Mimir?"

Then Mimir told Siegfried of Odin, the All-Father. How he had pledged his eye for a drink from Mimir's well of wisdom that he might know all that the fates decreed for men, and how he was the greatest of the gods and could transform himself into any shape so that he might appear as fish or bird or beast or shadow when he passed by.

Days passed and winter came. The way to Mimir's haunt was along a cold road now, with frozen ridges to cross and rivers of ice to ford. And the north was a dismal land of frosty headlands and snow-swept fenways. Siegfried was taught to run on snow shoes and he traveled to remote parts of the forest over the heavy snow. He reached the high mountains rising above the woods, and ran nimbly up their slippery sides. He tried to reach their highest ledges, hoping to see what lay on the other side, but as soon as he neared the peaks where birds of prey circled he was beaten back by the sheer walls of rock so smooth that even the snow could not cling to them. Sadly the boy would start down again, passing wolf-haunted cliffs and caves. Fighting the hail-driven winds he would make his way back to the grotto in the forest.

When Mimir went forth, he rode a reindeer. One day he had harnessed his beast, and was busying himself about the cave filling a great bag with food and clothing.

"Where are you going?" Siegfried demanded.

"On a journey," Mimir answered hurriedly.

"You are going to the world outside the forest—and you are going to take me with you," cried the boy.

"Not yet," said Mimir with a smile, "you have neither horse nor sword. A fine figure you would make. People would say, 'Who is this child you have brought along, Mimir?' "

Siegfried was proud. He knew that he had no sword, that he had no steed, and that he was not yet tall enough to be received by kings. But he watched Mimir out of sight with angry eyes.

For days the ground was covered with a hard coat of ice and a gnashing frost withered every green thing. But at last winter gave way to a spring of thunder and rain. The rime-covered forest returned to life again and Siegfried began dreaming of the endless summer days that would take the place of the long darkness of night. The earth became fragrant and the river began to swell and flow with a rushing sound. The forest was filled with the songs of spring.

The night that Mimir came home, a fearful storm raged. Siegfried sat at the door of the cavern with the spray of the rain blowing in upon him. The thunder crashed through the forest and the lightning was like the white flame of Mimir's well. Suddenly the road

was as bright as day, and Siegfried saw the driven figure of Mimir hurrying along. The dwarf was on foot. He stumbled and fell a dozen times before he reached the cave.

"Well—so you have come back," Siegfried said bitterly.

Mimir ran like a drenched rat to the furthest corner of the cavern and buried his head beneath a furry skin.

Siegfried sat with his heart filled with scorn for the cowardly dwarf. A fierce resentment surged through him. He called imperatively:

"Mimir—come out of that hole or I shall drive you out with a stick."

The dwarf was so amazed at this change in Siegfried that he came forth trembling to see what it meant.

"Sit down—there are words to be said, Mimir, and you shall not escape until you have heard them."

The fitful glare of the lightning came weirdly into the cave. As it flashed, Mimir saw that Siegfried was white with anger. His mouth was resolute and there was nothing childlike in his eyes. The dwarf shivered with fear. What new Siegfried was this? The brain of the stunted man whirled as he marshalled all his wits to meet him.

"Mimir, there are questions that you will never answer for me. I have asked you again and again where I came from and who were my father and mother. You have answered from the hind that nourished me in the forest. I know that I am not like her fawns. I have seen that I am not like any animal

in the woods so I could not have been born of them. I know also that I could not have been born of a dwarf for I have seen how ugly and cowardly a dwarf is. Who am I, then, and from what manner of men did I come?"

"I do not know," said Mimir.

Then Siegfried's eyes flashed and his body trembled with rage. "Do not tell me that you are ignorant of this thing, Mimir. How many times have you boasted that the Well of Wisdom can teach you anything that you wish to know? You must have peered into its depths to learn of me."

"You speak as a child," said Mimir, "of things that you do not understand."

For hours they fenced with words, but Siegfried was beaten from the start. Mimir had taught him all that he knew, and this poor learning was the only weapon with which the boy could battle against Mimir's wits. Siegfried knew only the good things, for the dwarf had taught him by the laws of Odin. Mimir had said:

"He who is never silent
Speaks too many meaningless words,"

so now Seigfried remained silent and the dwarf crushed him with argument.

Mimir had said:

"Silent and thoughtful
Should a king's son be."

And now when Siegfried was still, he was outwitted. At last the boy turned to the dwarf and said almost pitifully: "Why then, Mimir, did you wish me to

belong to you? What am I good for? Am I to stay all of my life in this grotto?"

Mimir glowed with pleasure and rubbed his hands together. This was the question he had long wished Siegfried to ask. For many months he had cherished a plan for the boy—but he had waited until the time was ripe for its telling.

"No, Siegfried—you are not to live the life of a hermit in a forest inhabited only by animals. That is the fate of such as me. Your destiny is a more glorious one. You may dare the bravest deed and yet never fear to die. The three Norns spin the fate of every man. Only the doomed ones shall die, and never will they spell the doom of such a one as you."

"What are you saying, Mimir?" Siegfried's voice interrupted sharply.

"I am telling you that you may live life joyously and with contempt for all danger. Your summons to depart comes at the hour of fate. Chance rules the lives of men. Live gallantly and do not sit idly awaiting your doom," said Mimir.

"Yes—but what has all that to do with me?" said Siegfried impatiently.

"Have you ever thought that you would like to be a hero?" Mimir asked. "Have you dreamed of your name and your deeds exalted in song and saga?"

"Ah yes, Mimir, but a hero must fight with a gleaming sword and I have no sword. He must ride a swift steed and I have no horse. And most important of all, he must go on some dangerous quest that others

fear to try. I know of no quest that needs a hero," said the boy passionately.

"Listen, Siegfried, to a story I will tell you."

"I am tired of your stories, Mimir. You told me to learn your sagas so that when I became a great chief I would be able to tell them at feasts and around the fire on winter nights. Now I am afraid I will never be a chief. Come—let us play at chess and perhaps I will learn tonight that of two possible moves there is always one that is the best."

"No, you must hear one more story. It is a true story of a quest more terrible than any left on earth. Every hero in the northlands has known of it, and not one of them will dare to take it for his own."

"Mimir—you are mocking me," Siegfried's eyes were filled with desire, but he dared not believe what the dwarf said.

"The tale I have to tell you," Mimir said, "is of the curse of Andvari. There lived a dwarf called Andvari who dwelt in a waterfall and sometimes changed himself into a pike that he might swim unnoticed in the river. He owned a great treasure and kept it hidden in a rocky hole near the river's edge."

"What has all this to do with me?" cried Siegfried impatiently.

"Hush—you are not listening to the story," was all that Mimir answered. "We must leave the dwarf Andvari for a moment and turn to another part of this same happening. My father was named Hreidmar and he had three sons. The first son was Fafnir, the

greatest of all of us, who could take what he wanted in this world because of his great strength. The second son was Otter who at night became a man and by day lived in the form of an otter who fished in the river. I was the third child—the least of my brothers because I was only a dwarf. All the strength I had was in my mind and the only skill I possessed was the working of iron and silver and gold."

"So even you had a father, Mimir—even a mean little dwarf has brothers. Some day I will find out who my father was! The cubs are the children of bears, the fawns are the children of the hind, Mimir is the son of Hreidmar—but who is Siegfried?"

"Listen," Mimir said patiently, "if you would hear my plan for you."

"Go on with your story, then," said Siegfried, "but if it is one of your dark and ugly plans, you may well beware of me. I will have none of your cowardly ways."

"It so happened that Loki, a wicked God, killed my second brother as he swam in the river disguised as an otter," Mimir continued. "And Hreidmar, my father, who was all powerful, demanded from Loki a blood ransom of this deed. Loki was to bring him enough red gold to fill the skin of the dead otter. Loki was clever and formed an easy plan to capture the treasure of another so that he would not have to give up any treasure of his own to my father."

"Andvari's treasure," interrupted Siegfried, carried away by the story in spite of himself.

"Yes—you are clever, Siegfried. Loki took a net and caught Andvari the next time the dwarf turned himself into a pike. Andvari was told that he would die unless he gave up his treasure, so he led Loki into the hollow of the rock where the gold of his treasure was hidden. Loki took it all and started forth. As he left, he noticed that Andvari had kept out a certain gold ring and Loki demanded this from him also."

"The cursed ring," cried Siegfried.

"It was not cursed until that moment. But when Andvari saw that he could not keep even this trifle for himself, he flew into a fury and cried out that whoever should possess the ring would be accursed and die. Loki gave the ring and the treasure to my father, and Andvari's curse began its work."

"Did your father die—did the ring really kill him?" Siegfried's eyes were wide with excitement.

"Yes, he was killed," answered Mimir slowly, "killed by my brother Fafnir who wanted all things for himself. Fafnir was strong enough to murder his own father and take possession of the treasure."

"But the ring must have punished Fafnir for his deed," said the boy.

"No—not yet," Mimir answered slyly. "There are none brave enough to kill Fafnir."

"What do you mean—he is only a man," cried Siegfried.

"No, Siegfried, my brother Fafnir was the cleverest of men. He took his treasure off to the far mountains where the Nibelungs live. They are the children of

the mist who dwell in the depths of the mountain and work all day with gold and precious jewels. Alberich, their king, teaches the Nibelungs ways of increasing Fafnir's treasure."

"But where is Fafnir?" asked the boy.

"Fafnir has turned himself into a terrible dragon so that he may guard the hoard. He lies across the mouth of the entrance to the mountain. He is the most frightful of all worms, and no one dares to approach him."

"An ugly story, Mimir," said Siegfried thoughtfully.

"And would you let so ugly a thing live on," said Mimir slyly.

"Then this is the quest, Mimir? This is the deed that is to make of me a hero?" The boy's face was white with earnestness.

"Kill Fafnir, and the gold is yours. Kill Fafnir, and my father is avenged. Slay the dragon, and you will have done what no other man on earth has dared to try," answered Mimir.

"Bah—I would not take the gold," said Siegfried. "It shall be yours and the curse of Andvari will go to you next, Mimir. But gladly will I slay this dragon that none can vanquish."

"I am not afraid of the curse of the ring," said Mimir, "it has not yet killed Fafnir, and besides what powers has the dwarf Andvari compared with those of mine?"

"I must have a sword with a blade of ice and fire, and I must have a steed that rides like the wind," cried Siegfried.

"You shall have a sword," answered Mimir, "a sword by my craft, and that same sword shall slay Fafnir."

"Will you finish it quickly so that I may be off without delay to the mountain where the dragon lives?"

"If I am to make a sword mighty enough to slay Fafnir, I must work upon it for many days," Mimir cautioned the eager boy. "Do not be impatient, Siegfried. Think how long I have waited to avenge the death of my father. It was not until I looked into your eyes that I knew that some day this might be so."

"Is the dragon so terrible, then, Mimir?" Siegfried whispered in awe.

"The dragon has meant death to every man who has crossed his path," answered Mimir.

"Mimir—I must go at once upon this quest before another shall undertake it," cried Siegfried impatiently.

"Not yet, Siegfried. There is still some waiting before you reach the time of man. The moment for your going must be the ripe one, for you must not fail me in this quest."

Siegfried sighed, but he knew that Mimir was right. He was only a boy—without sword or steed to fight Fafnir.

Chapter V

THE HORSE GREYFELL

THE flame and the clang of Mimir's forge lent an ominous air to the grotto from one day to the next. Restlessly Siegfried wandered off to the forest, and always came back to the grotto before he had traveled any distance. Mimir was at work upon the sword that was to kill Fafnir, and the boy could think of nothing else.

"Be off, Siegfried, you disturb my labours," whined Mimir, raking the ashes with nervous fingers.

But Siegfried knew that the dwarf was trying to keep secret his manner of forging a sword.

"I will not be off, cinder-blower. Let me help in the making of this blade, Mimir. You yourself have told me that the strength of a sword is the strength of its maker. What strength have you? How can I go away and leave you to twist and hammer and mold your weakness into the metal? It is a sword of sorrow you will make instead of a blade of glory. Teach me how to forge the weapon."

"You are speaking like a silly minstrel," scoffed Mimir.

So Siegfried seized the bellows and blew the flames until they were like tall red trees, and the glow of Mimir's fires had never reached so far into the forest.

The animals shrank further away from the glade, so that the dwarf and the boy were alone together.

For days, Mimir put off the final tempering of the blade. He worked instead on the hilt of the sword, studding it with jewels from the dark earth and the mountain depths. Siegfried became fretful in his helplessness.

"What do I care for show, Mimir—what good are golden trappings and jeweled designs? They will not bring the death blood from a dragon!"

But Mimir did not heed him. Painstakingly the dwarf carved runes of magic upon the hilt, believing that these charms would do more for Siegfried than the strength of the blade.

"When can we plunge the steel into its final heat and temper it in the Well?" Siegfried asked again and again.

Often Mimir would answer, "Perhaps tomorrow," but tomorrow came and the blade was no nearer done than before.

While he waited, Siegfried dreamed of his sword. He compared it with those swords that Mimir had told him of in saga and song. He wondered if it would be strong enough, or like the weapon that a certain Thorolf gave to a man called Thorstein. Thorstein tested the sword. He caught its point and bent the blade between his hands until the point touched the guard. When he let it spring back it did not straighten again, and he knew it was weak and useless. Siegfried wondered if his sword would be bright like the sword

called Thegn that had been polished three times. He did not want his blade poisoned at the tip during its forging, for the tales that Mimir told of poisoned wounds seemed inglorious. He liked best the stories of heroes who died from deep wounds pierced by a sword's clean point.

The boy's dream of a sword included all the beauty and fame of every sword he had ever heard about: the famous sword Tyrfing that belonged to the son of Odin and was said to cut down hosts of men like saplings: the sword Brynthvari with which Hraungvid fought in sixty battles and found at the end of that time his blade had never dulled; the sword Andgrvadil, taken from the slain Bjorn Blue-tooth, which victory always followed; and Dragvandil, and Leggbit with its guards of walrus tusk and a hilt covered with gold. Siegfried thought of his sword in the words that poets had used: as the gleam of the battle, the viper of the host, the thorn of the shields. He imagined it performing all the feats of the world's most prodigious blades: cutting a silken scarf in two as it floated in the air; cleaving a warrior through helmet, breastplate and horse so that all were halved as they fell to the earth. And if there was a secret longing in the boy's heart it was, perhaps, that instead of Mimir—who was only a dwarf—it might have been the great god Odin who was forging the sword, or that the weapon could have come down through a long line of sturdy forefathers as some of the great heirlooms in the sagas had done.

At last Mimir called Siegfried to him and said: "To-

night we will temper the blade." Siegfried was pale and tense when the time came for Mimir to plunge the white-hot sword into the Well of Urd. The steam clouds covered the two who watched. When the mist had cleared, Siegfried saw that even Mimir was excited. He pulled at his matted beard and rubbed his hands together over the sword that lay on the ground. In a singsong voice he muttered strange incantations that Siegfried could not understand.

It was almost beyond their endurance to wait until the time was ready for trying the powers of the blade. When Mimir brought forth the finished sword with loving hands and gave it to Siegfried, both thought that it was the most beautiful weapon in the world. The blue steel looked like the cold hard ice of the northlands and the gold and jeweled hilt was like sun upon flowers.

"How do you like it?" Mimir cried, dancing with joy.

Siegfried did not speak. He turned toward the anvil and smote the sword upon it with a fearful blow. And he heard the terrible tinkling of the broken pieces that fell on the rocky floor.

Mimir uttered a single cry and fled to a dark corner of the cave. Siegfried hurled the broken shards into the dead ashes and flung the useless jeweled hilt through the open door into the dark pool of the Well of Wisdom. Then he strode silently from the grotto.

For the first time in his life, Siegfried felt despair. He had neither sword nor steed, and the quest that

Mimir had told him of was farther away than before. How could he start forth on a perilous journey with nothing to aid him on his dangerous errand? As he stood brooding beneath a grove of trees, Siegfried saw a figure coming toward him. He stood motionless, wondering who could have come to the forest. As long as he had lived there, he had observed no passerby save Mimir and the animals. The figure drew closer and Siegfried saw that he was an old man of massive height who walked with bent head and shoulders. He wore a cloak of rich blue that swept in long folds to the ground and a hat with a great brim that cast his face in shadows. Siegfried thought that he had never seen such a beautiful flowing beard.

"There is a strange unrest in your heart, Siegfried," the old man said, and his voice was so low and at the same time so compelling that Siegfried forgot to marvel that this stranger had read his thoughts.

"Who are you?" the boy breathed in wonder.

"I am a Wanderer," answered the old man. "I have come to lead you to a horse."

"How did you know that I desired a horse?"

"There is much that I know," said the Wanderer. "For one thing I can tell what the loud chattering sea-mew says—for another that a certain steed awaits such an owner as you. Follow me. I will lead you to the river called Busil-tarn. It is in a far part of the forest where you have never been," said the old man.

"I would travel all day and every night from moon to moon in search of a horse," cried Siegfried.

They started without further words upon a mystifying journey. For an old man, the stranger walked with amazing speed. Siegfried ran the slow steady trot that the animals had taught him to use when there were many miles to be covered. The boy could not follow the turnings and twistings his leader took. He only knew that the forest changed before his eyes. Familiar landmarks disappeared. New ridges loomed in sight. Siegfried lost all track of time. The stranger had little to say to him, but the boy felt peaceful and happy when he was near the other. At last they reached the banks of a river that was like a continuous falls. There was not a spot as far as Siegfried could see that was not covered with white foam. A barrier of mist rose above the rapids and hovered in the air like steam from a giant cauldron.

"Why, it isn't a river!" the boy cried, "it is a great whirlpool."

"Come with me," said the old man.

Siegfried followed him over a rocky plateau. They found themselves in the folds of rugged hills. Far down in the hollow of a beautiful little valley rested a herd of horses. There were small chestnut mares, black colts and white stallions. There were chargers as strong and heavy as bucks. They raised their proud heads and stared at the intruders.

And Siegfried saw the Wanderer lift his hand and at once the whole herd sped over the mountainside and down to the river—the long-legged colts, the gentle mares, and the stamping stallions.

"Wait here," said the old man as the last horse started toward the river bank.

Siegfried stood with his eyes strained to the thrilling scene below. He saw the whole herd of horses plunge down the incline and gallop straight toward the roaring eddy that was called the river Busil-tarn. A few of the horses shied when they reached the banks; others tumbled in and were swept out of sight with the current. The strongest chargers battled with the foam and made their way back to the shore again.

Siegfried groaned and hid his eyes at the sight of this terrible destruction, but the voice of the Wanderer said sternly:

"Those who have died deserved to die for their weakness. If they had not perished here in this way, they would soon have been destroyed in some other fashion, for they are not strong enough to endure for long."

"But what was it—what did it mean?" cried the boy passionately.

"Look Siegfried—look down at the river now," said the other.

The boy lifted his head once more and saw that a single horse was still fighting the foam. It was a grey horse—the largest and most powerful of the chargers —with a head like a wild stag. Already the noble animal had reached midstream and was plunging on toward the opposite bank. Breathlessly Siegfried watched. Now the water rushed down in such swift and sheer volume that it pushed the horse under, and

for an agonizing moment it seemed as if he could not rise again. Now the horse's head was buffeted back until the boy hid his eyes, believing the beast's neck was broken. It was the greatest fight that Siegfried had ever seen, and when the grey horse reached the shore and stood there with the sun changing his glistening body to gold, the boy shivered in awe. The animal stood as motionless as the rocks that bordered the shore and it seemed as if he were carved from some nobler substance than the hills.

"The horse comes from the kin of Sleipnir and he shall be yours until you die," said the voice of the Wanderer. "Let him find your way and follow him with a trusting heart."

And in a flash Siegfried remembered that Sleipnir was Odin's horse—had not the riddle said so—and he knew this old man in the blue cloak must be Odin himself. When he turned to meet the gaze of the Allfather, he found that Odin had vanished, and at the same moment he heard the loud clatter of horse's hoofs as the herds beside the river disappeared from sight.

As Siegfried stood, wonderingly, he saw the grey horse plunge back into the stream and swim easily across. When the beast reached the shore, he ran lightly up the slope and stood near Siegfried. The boy saw that, mysteriously, the horse was bridled and saddled, and he knew this too was the work of Odin.

Gently Siegfried touched the quivering animal. He looked into the soft intelligent eyes, and it seemed to him that the horse's gaze was friendly. Siegfried

decided to call him Greyfell because of his satiny grey skin.

At last the boy mounted the steed that was to be his own. Greyfell turned back toward that part of the forest where familiar glades were waiting. The boy felt himself carried like the wind over meadow and lea, through thickets and groves and lanes to the depths of the glades of Yggdrasil.

Siegfried was radiant. The broken sword was forgotten. The whole world centred about Greyfell—the steed descended from Odin's horse and given to Siegfried by Odin.

When Mimir heard the thud of horse's hoofs, he rushed from his grotto, filled with foreboding. Coming toward him was a grey charger and riding the horse, as if their bodies were one, was Siegfried. The boy's ruddy curls were wildly blown. He shouted and laughed, beside himself with joy.

"Where did you get that horse?" Mimir whimpered.

"From Odin himself," cried Siegfried.

The dwarf said nothing. He turned and went back to his cave with bent head and a fearful heart. What did all this mean? What interest could Odin have in a half-tamed forest child? Mimir shuddered, for he knew that his power over Siegfried would soon vanish if Odin took the boy into his care. What strange weaving of fate was this?

After that, Mimir worked harder than ever upon a second sword that he was making for Siegfried. From time to time he reminded the boy of the quest for

Fafnir's gold. He described the worm in frightful words, saying slyly that there lived no man who dared to approach the dragon. But Siegfried tossed his head impatiently and told Mimir to hurry with the forging of the new sword. Until he had a weapon, he could not start upon a quest.

While the dwarf slaved at the forge, Siegfried rode many miles upon Greyfell. Sometimes the animals of the forest gathered around the boy when he stopped to let Greyfell drink from the river or eat the luxuriant grass in the meadows. They seemed to rejoice because Siegfried had a friend that was of their own kind.

Horse and rider understood each other well. If the way was steep, Greyfell went cautiously so that he would not plunge Siegfried down the precipices. But if the way was clear, the horse sped nimbly along, knowing that his rider loved the clean sweep of the wind in his face and the thrilling movement of the animal beneath him.

Mimir was jealous and resentful. Although he was glad that Siegfried had a steed for his quest, it enraged him to have this steed the gift of Odin. So the hate and the envy of Mimir went into the forging of the new sword and as it grew it seemed more terrible than the last sword that had been merely beautiful. This time, Mimir left the handle bare of runes and jewels and gold. He worked solely upon the blade.

Once more, Siegfried was impatient for the day of the sword's testing. Finally Mimir had given the handle its final heat, and turning to Siegfried he said:

"I will not dip it in the well to cool it. Get me enough blood from some animal to cover the blade and I will have the true death temper."

"No—I will not take the blood of my friends for the sword," said Siegfried, "but you may cup me and take my blood for it, Mimir."

Before Siegfried could stop him, Mimir had opened a vein in his own arm and was bathing the blade in his dark blood. The dwarf feared to take the blood of Siegfried lest it weaken the boy in some subtle way.

"Now that the sword has your blood in its veins, I know what to expect of it," cried Siegfried bitterly.

"And this is your gratitude?" whined Mimir.

When the time came for the testing of the blade, the boy hurled it against the rocky wall of the cavern. Half-heartedly his eyes watched to see what would happen. He did not even cry out when the blade shattered. It was Mimir who raged and sobbed, until Siegfried said almost pityingly:

"Mimir, know now—you can never forge a sword that is strong enough for Siegfried. There is neither courage nor goodness in you, and a sword is but the reflection of the man who makes it."

"Thankless cub," cried Mimir, "is this my reward for all the pains and labors I have spent for you? Some day you will thank me for telling you of the quest that will make of you a hero," screamed the dwarf.

Siegfried turned and left the cave. He stalked the forest glades, blind to his surroundings. Once more —despair. How could he slay Fafnir when he had no

sword? What faith could he have in his own courage if he did not know whether his father had had courage before him? As the boy paced wearily along, he heard the thud of Greyfell's hoofs and soon the horse rubbed against him lovingly. Siegfried hid his head in the silky grey mane. After a while he jumped on Greyfell's back and let the horse take him where he willed.

Chapter VI

THE LAST OF THE VOLSUNGS

THEY galloped on wind-driven nights and they traveled throughout the long wet spring, and Siegfried's thoughts were wilder and drearier than the rainy winds. Greyfell turned toward the untrodden ways of the giant forest. They skirted the edge of bleak fjords and lonely coasts. For the first time, Siegfried saw the sea stretching before him like a grey flat plain. He looked at it from a bare mountain top many miles inland. The sea yawned widely and the waters were so vast they could not be diminished even by the distance. Siegfried was not disappointed in what he saw. It was a wild sea for Viking ships to conquer. He looked at distant coves and stretches of wet sand lying desolate.

And so the days passed and summer came gently to the northlands. The scenes changed to more peaceful ones. The horse and rider wandered again toward the green hollows of the woods, passing small shallow ponds where white birds swam and colored flowers floated. There was a fountain that stood like a golden tree. And always the forest seemed more endless than before. Siegfried would think that he had escaped it, finding himself on a barren plain. But the plain was always bordered by trees, and when Greyfell reached

the grove they would find themselves in another part of the deep wood, surrounded by the pines again.

Siegfried had drifted far away from thoughts of Mimir and of Fafnir. The story of the quest was only a story now, and the forging of a sword had ceased to be even a dream. The boy might have been swept back to a life with the animals if it had not been for Greyfell. One night they came to the cave of the bears, and the joy of the cubs at the sight of Siegfried touched him deeply. He made ready to spend the time until daybreak with them, but when the bears pawed him lovingly, the grey charger tossed his head and neighed loudly. Greyfell's distress led Siegfried to go on, and he never knew how nearly he had come to returning to his primitive untamed existence with the wild things.

One day Siegfried looked up and saw the Wanderer striding toward him from a long way off. He was wrapped closely in his great blue mantle and his shoulders were bent as if the weight of the cloak were too much to bear. Siegfried galloped to meet Odin.

The slow gaze of the Allfather scanned the boy who sat erect on his horse, and the old man nodded as if he were pleased at what he saw.

"And what of Greyfell?" said Odin.

"There has never been a steed like him," boasted Siegfried joyfully. "He is tireless as the wind and the endlessly moving sea. And we are always of one mind. Should I desire to explore a highland, a dell, a spray-drenched beach, a combe, a ness, Greyfell has had the desire first and leads me there straightway."

"And what of Mimir?" asked Odin.

"The last I saw of Mimir he was cowering in a corner, bemoaning the fact that you had given me a horse. I think that perhaps he was afraid," laughed Siegfried.

"So Mimir is frightened again," said the old man grimly.

"Why have you come this way," said Siegfried—"could it have been—to find me?" he added shyly.

"I have come to tell you the story of a weapon that is waiting for you," said Odin.

Siegfried threw himself down on the grass at the Wanderer's feet. Stretching there like a lithe young animal, he listened to the brooding voice of the old man. The boy could not keep his eyes from the face of the Allfather—he studied the furrows in the mighty brow. He shivered at the sight of the single eye that glowed one moment and the next dulled like a burned-out coal. The mouth was a single line that drooped at the corners, giving an expression of infinite weariness. Sometimes when Odin was still, his face seemed carved out of rock, it was so massive and sternly marked with hollows and planes. The bushy brows and long flowing beard were a part of the magnificence of that mighty head. The only other image of man that Siegfried had ever seen was Mimir, the twisted and ugly. It was no wonder that the boy was stirred by the god's marvelous visage.

"You found me a horse," said the boy with glowing eyes, "can it be that you will find me a sword as well?"

Odin smiled at Siegfried's eagerness. It was the first time the boy had seen the Wanderer lose his brooding sterness. The gentleness of the smile touched Siegfried. He had never known tenderness and now he felt its nearness.

"The sword of your father is waiting for you, Siegfried."

"My father!" the boy sprang to his feet and stood white and trembling before Odin. "Who was my father? Do you know? Mimir has made me think that I had no father or at least that he has perished long since and none can tell what manner of man he was."

"The time has come for you to hear the story of the mighty line of heroes who were called the Volsungs, of your father who was the most glorious of them all, and of the sword Gram."

"Then my father had a sword to leave to me—like the other great heroes in saga and song?" Siegfried cried. "But what is it all? I cannot understand. I do not know who these men were that you call Volsungs."

Odin spoke quietly to the excited boy. "Lean against the trunk of that tree yonder, Siegfried. Prepare to hear the long story of your birth. I will tell it as simply as I can, and you must ask me any questions that you wish."

"I will," answered Siegfried as he obeyed.

"Mimir has recounted many sagas to you and rightly have you noted that every hero of fame has sprung from some noble line. The greatest family of the northlands was called Volsung and you are the last of

"Then my father had a sword to leave me—like the other great heroes in saga and song?"

the line. Your grandfather lived in a rugged hall far over the icy sea. He was a man of great strength, primitive and stern. That was the kind of house he chose to live in. Hewed trees were its walls and the roof-tree of the great central council hall was a thick, gnarled oak called Branstock, whose trunk grew up through the middle of the room. Beneath its branches, your grandfather sat upon his throne. There were no garlands of silver and gold in this hall; war-like shields lined the walls. Your grandfather followed his simple and stern tastes. He willed that his house should be as he was himself, rugged and strong. And yet it was none the less the palace of a king. There were stables of reindeer and horses. There were many portals and pillar posts that belonged to the Volsungs, for the houses of the north were built in rows, each house a separate room, and many were the rooms that your grandfather possessed. On his vast estates were cattle and sheep. He owned some forest-land and a strange spring whose vapour changed everything it touched to stone. Near the central hall a rock-road led to the sea where ice floes passed like ghostly ships, filling the air with a deep roar—the more terrible because it was voiceless. This was the home of the Volsungs."

"My father lived there too?" asked Siegfried.

"Yes—among the many children of the Volsung king—Siegmund, your father, stood forth. I had watched the boy with great joy. He was somewhat like yourself, Siegfried—tall, and brown as a nut, with hair of ruddy gold. He was impatient for adventure,

even as you are aching for some quest at this very moment. As again and again the lad proved himself worthy of the faith I had in him, I began to cherish him with a certain love that I had never felt for a man of earthly descent. There came a moment when I visioned the suffering and hardships that confronted him, and I wished him to have a sword worthy of himself and the danger he was to meet."

"A sword of your own making?" cried the boy.

Odin smiled, "I did not forge it upon an anvil, Siegfried. I thought of the sword as I would like it to be, and it lay there before me. I took it in my hands and caressed its cold blade and called it Gram, which is the word meaning all that is full of wrath. Then traveling to the hall of the Volsungs, disguised as you see me now, I strode in upon a merry feast that was going forward there."

"Were there many brave heroes present?" asked Siegfried eagerly.

"Yes, the hall was thick with smoke and loud with mirth. I saw the Earl of Siggeir, the Goth, there, and I saw Dal the Fat, and Knut the Fair. I saw the sons of the Volsung line and the gayest and roughest of all of them was young Siegmund who was to become your father. I strode straight to the rugged trunk of the tree called Branstock. I struck the sword Gram into the heart of the tree with a mighty blow, and I knew that none but young Siegmund would have the strength to draw this sword out again."

"And did my father perform this mighty feat?"

whispered the boy, half fearful lest Odin would disappoint him in the answer.

"Yes—Siegmund drew forth Gram, and Gram saved his life many times before he died."

"But what of my father's father, the King of the Volsungs? What end was his?" said Siegfried.

"The story is long and sad—you shall hear it some day from your mother who still lives. It is enough now to say that the tribes of the Goths were treacherous and slew all of the Volsungs. But in the first battle Siegmund alone escaped death and married Hjordis, a beautiful woman who is the foster-child of the good King Hjalprek. Hjordis' own father was dead and she had lived a long time at Hjalprek's court not far from this great forest. A child was born of this marriage and he was named Siegfried, the last of the Volsungs."

"And I am that child," Siegfried said.

"You wish to know more of the death of your father, and how you came to be a foundling in this forest?" said Odin gently.

"Ah, but my mother could not have loved me if she did not want to keep me. The hind mothered her fawns and was fearful every time they strayed away," the boy said bitterly.

"Siegfried!" Odin's voice was cold and harsh. His lips were a thin line, without gentleness. "You would condemn before you know the truth. Like the accusing Mimir, you would willingly blame before you know the justice of your act."

Siegfried hung his head. But he squared his shoulders and looked straight at the old man. "I am sorry," he said, and he did not excuse his act with childish words.

"Your father and Hjordis lived happily in the court of Hjalprek, until one day those same Goths who had wiped out the line of the Volsungs came to war upon the northmen. You were a baby in the arms of Hjordis and your father was that same glorious Siegmund who had pulled the sword Gram from the tree in the hall of the Volsungs. The battle was a terrible one, and Hjordis took you and ran to the edge of this same forest that we are in now. There she hid and watched the fighting of her husband, Siegmund. It was at that moment, Siegfried, the voice of fate was heard. One of the three Norns who govern all lives spoke the doom of Siegmund. It is the fates—not Odin—who cry men's deaths. I could not disobey the word of the Norns, so I shattered the sword of Gram in two shards and Siegmund was mortally wounded by his enemy."

"Why did he have to die?" Siegfried cried resentfully.

"Hush—there are things that you have not yet learned. Every man is summoned to depart at the hour of fate. What beauty is there in living forever?" said Odin. "Have you not heard tell of gleaming Valhalla, the hall of the slain that is roofed with the silver shields of warriors who died in battle? There is where brave heroes go when they leave this earth. Its

seat is at Logafjoll. Overhead flash northern lights and forth from the glory high-helmeted girls rush riding, blotches of blood on their breastplates and fire dripping from the tips of their spears. These are the Valkyries. It is the wish of every warrior to go to Valhalla some day to the sound of their exultant cry, and so it was the wish of Siegmund and he was happy to die."

"I think that I understand," sighed the boy.

"But when Hjordis saw her husband fall, she forgot everything in her fear for him. She wrapped you close in a blanket and hid you in the thickets of the forest. Then she sped out upon the battlefield to kneel at the side of her lord before he died."

"And was there yet time to speak with him before he left her?" said Siegfried.

"Yes, there was time for Siegmund to comfort Hjordis as, aching with grief, she bent over him. He spoke to her of you, Siegfried, and that was her comfort when he died. He told her that a stronger Volsung than any of the other Volsung heroes lived still. He charged her to keep the shards of Gram so that the sword might be welded together again for this last one of the Volsungs. And Hjordis saw Siegmund die with a smile on his lips. She left him on the battlefield for she knew that he belonged to the Valkyries now. Even as she left him, she heard the rush of their terrible flight and she saw their mighty horses in a grey cloud and heard their glorious war-cry as they carried her lord to Valhalla: 'Hojotoho! Hojotoho! Heiaha! Heiaha!' "

"And what happened to me?" asked the boy.

Odin smiled whimsically. "Life was not to be easy for the last of the Volsungs. It had looked as if you were to be reared at the court of the good King Hjalprek much as any other young prince would have been raised. You would have had the best of teachers, and easiest of living and there would have been no hardships for you to bear. But the Norns who watched over you knew that such a life would weaken you. While your mother knelt at Siegmund's side in farewell, a hind from the forest heard your cries and carried you off to her home. When Hjordis came back to you she found that you were gone. Her grief was great. All the courtiers from Hjalprek's kingdom searched for you, but there is no human being who dares to trespass far into this wood. Men peered fearfully about from the edges of the thickets, but no one penetrated into the heart of the gloom, and so you were never found."

"My mother still lives?" said the boy softly.

"Yes, and so lives the great King Hjalprek just as he reigned when your father lived," said Odin. "Greyfell will carry you to his court. You must go to your mother and tell her the story of Gram. She will know that you are her son when you tell her that Odin has sent you to her for the broken shards of the sword."

"Why have you done all this for me?" cried Siegfried.

"You are the last of the Volsungs," said Odin seriously, "this line of men has been thus far the noblest

and the greatest in the north. Bitter have been the disappointments that the Norns have ordained for Volsung heroes, and terrible have been the sufferings of your father's kin. Because you are a Volsung you must suffer as well. Your life will be struggle and bloodshed and heartache. But Odin is ever beside you and the silver Valhalla awaits you in its world of clouds."

The Wanderer was gone. Siegfried looked one moment and saw him—with the rich blue cloak, the staff and the wide-brimmed hat—looked the next moment and beheld only the peaceful vista of countryside and Greyfell pawing the earth impatiently.

Siegfried felt his limbs tense with fatigue. He must have been listening for a long time. The story was engraved on his mind like the runes on a hard stone. The line of the Volsungs loomed—men with iron bodies and iron hearts, men of deeds and of tragedy. And Siegfried felt as he was certain the Volsungs had felt—and he understood them so well he knew that he was one of them.

Racing to Greyfell, the boy mounted his horse joyfully. He spurred him on. Let Greyfell go where he willed. Odin had said that the horse would lead its rider to the court of Hjalprek. Let Mimir, alone in the empty grotto, pace and wonder and cry. Not until Siegfried held the precious shards of the broken sword Gram would he come back to the smithy.

Chapter VII

THE WORLD OUTSIDE

AS SOON as Siegfried felt the horse beneath him leap forward, a mysterious exhilaration surged through him. The blood pounded hotly in his veins and he knew for the first time the meaning of impatience that has become almost a sickness. Over and over he thought of the sword Gram—the meeting with his mother—the court of Hjalprek—the battlefield where Siegmund fell. This bewildering confusion of scenes and pictures swept through the boy's mind like events of some stirring saga, and the words of Odin seemed little more than a marvelous story. The saga of the Volsungs was even less real than Mimir's tales. Impatiently Siegfried wondered when he would begin to live things for himself as his sturdy forefathers had done.

The charger was galloping along a highroad that lay between the forest and the sea. He had lowered his head and settled into a steady pace. Siegfried studied the contours of the wood and decided that the court of Hjalprek must lie at the other extreme of the forest. Greyfell had chosen the route around the wood rather than cutting back through the familiar glades that Siegfried already knew. Then the horse, too, understood that Siegfried must see a little of the world of

men before he passed the porch pillars of his grandfather's hall!

Siegfried was blind to his surroundings. In the days that were gone, he had marvelled at the limitless expanses of the sea, the salty smell of the sea wind and the wet flat beach where Greyfell left the mark of his hoofs. Now it was time to think of Mimir's stories of men—men and their deeds—men and their dwellings and ships and possessions. Siegfried tried to recall each detail of the dwarf's descriptions. He dreaded the thought of entering Hjalprek's court with questions on his lips and questions in his eyes. Whatever he saw—no matter how startling—Siegfried vowed he would show no betrayal of his surprise.

But even as he made these sturdy vows, he trembled with an exciting anticipation. And boyishly he wondered—what a man was like or what a ship resembled. There were only the images of Mimir and of Odin for comparison and there were only the memories of logs floating down the river from which to envision a ship. Such things were in Siegfried's mind as he rode along.

At that moment Greyfell followed the road into a small thicket, for at this point the highway cut through the last straggling fringe of the mighty forest. As so often happens, this small copse was more dense than a deeper wood. The trees were arched closely and the tangled bushes grew over the road so that it disappeared from view. Greyfell slowed his pace, as only a few feet at a time were visible ahead. Suddenly voices from

beyond the next bend startled Siegfried from his reverie and he pulled Greyfell to a sharp halt. Dismounting quickly, he stole softly forward to peer at the unknown speakers.

He saw a sight like nothing he had ever seen before. At the foot of a high bank were two horsemen—as different from each other as Mimir and Odin. In his fleeting glance, Siegfried saw that one rider was a thin wizened fellow with a sharp hawk-like face. His raw-boned figure was clasped closely in a coarse woolen mantle and his hairy legs were only partly covered by leggings made of colored cloth bound carelessly together. His horse was as spare as its rider—a thin old mare, sore-backed and beaten. Even as Siegfried thought—"So this is what a man is like!"—he turned to appraise the other horseman. Now this one was as fat as the other had been thin—as round and red and cheerful as the first was dried-up and forbidding. The portly rider wore a scarlet kirtle with a deep blue cloak over it and coming well down on his head was a bear-skin hood. He was mounted on a powerful white stallion with a painted, showy saddle. Each rider fingered his sword as he shouted at the other in anger. And most surprising of all, the voice of the small man was great and thunderous while the voice of the fat fellow rose in a thin wail!

"I tell you that you owe me three of your best cows," growled the thin man, "your animals wandered into my pastures and infected my good beasts with the murrain."

"Bah," spluttered the portly landowner, "my good cattle are above reproach. It was your own beasts that had the plague and they have infected mine."

"A plague upon you, Roller," said the small man sternly, "you cannot recognize the truth when you hear it. I will call a meeting of the moot who will judge you more harshly than myself. Come now—will you pay me back my three cattle?"

"Let the murrain take you before I will," screamed the other, his face turning so red that Siegfried half expected the blood to gush forth.

"I will let you consider this debt for the period of time in which it takes me to count ten. Then I shall draw my sword," announced the rider with the hawk-like face.

"You had better watch out when it comes to sword-play," cried the fat fellow with a fine show of bravado.

"One—two," was all the answer that he got.

"Oft with a conquering hand have I bowed the necks of the mighty," boasted the owner of the diseased cattle.

"Three—four," was the reply to his bragging.

"If you do not stop that silly chattering, I will chase you," the portly fellow took off his fur hat to fan himself and Siegfried saw that his head was round and slippery with no hair growing upon it.

"Five—six—seven—eight—"

"Chase you I will, you varlet," said the rider of the white stallion but Siegfried noticed that one pudgy hand was pinching the horse to be off in the other

direction and one wide toe nudged the ribs of the beast to goad him into running away. What manner of chase was this, mused the boy, when he who threatened to do the chasing was trying his best to be off in the opposite direction from him whom he was going to attack?

"Nine—ten!" with a clang the shrunken little man spurted his old mare forward and waved his long sword.

The fat rider dropped all pretense of valor and kicked his horse violently in the ribs. The white stallion leaped forward and his portly master felt the reins wrenched from his fat hands. He dropped the fur cap that he still held and clutched frantically at the waving mane of the steed. Then Siegfried lightly vaulted a bush and flung himself upon the bridle of the run-away horse. The flight was effectively ended.

"Now," said the boy smiling at the furious and terrified rider, "you may meet your neighbor in sword-play. Let the battle go on."

"Whoever you may be?" choked the frightened run-away.

"My name is Siegfried and what is yours?"

"I am called Roller and yon varlet is a mean and stingy landowner whose estate joins mine. He is named Erik—a common enough name—every roof harbors one," sniffed the speaker.

At that moment Erik who had sat calmly on his piebald mare observing this unexpected scene, was reminded of his quarrel by his neighbor's insulting

remarks regarding his name. He was known throughout the countryside as a man slow to anger, and one who would rather use threats than his fists. But now another threat would be useless, for this newcomer named Siegfried was present to see that battle was done. When Erik heard his name termed a common one, he reached the limit of his endurance. Carelessly he lifted his sword and unloosed a great clod of earth from a rocky hillock above Roller's head. An earthy avalanche descended and a flurry of little stones pattered down upon the bare pate of the screaming Roller. But as Siegfried joined in Erik's mocking laughter, he suddenly saw the eyes of the little man grow large with horror. Following his gaze, Siegfried saw that in unloosing the clod of earth, Erik had undermined a great boulder. The rock was slowly toppling and it was a matter of seconds before it would come down upon their heads. Siegfried jumped between the horses and the hillock with so quick a lunge that the animals reared back fearfully. Before Siegfried could leap back himself, the boulder was upon him, but he caught it easily in his arms and tossed it to the side of the road so that it did no harm.

"Who can this be—the offspring of giants?" cried Erik.

The round, surprised face of Roller peared through the gloom of the woods to view this performer of miracles.

"Will you be my thrall?" Roller cried excitedly, thinking to enlist this wild young man in his service

before the shrewd Erik did, "I will pay you more than he will," and Roller pointed scornfully at Erik's tattered woolen cloak and the rough shoes on his feet, "I have thirty tenant farms under me and he has only ten."

Siegfried laughed merrily. How Mimir would shudder at the thought of this. Siegfried—the last of a line of kings—turned bondservant for a portly country gentleman.

"No thank you," he said politely, "I am on my way to the court of King Hjalprek on a mission of some importance. Perhaps you can tell me if I am on the right road."

"King Hjalprek!" The plump Roller was visibly impressed.

"What do you know of this king?" Siegfried asked.

"Nothing save what is said of him—that he is the best of good men. He has annulled many unrighteous laws, paid off the debts of men in his service, fostered the sick and wounded of his armies and has kept the loyalty of all of his subjects by his greatness and his patriotism."

Siegfried's heart glowed when he heard Hjalprek well spoken of by this landsman.

"You cannot go all the way to the court in a day," interrupted Erik, "will you come to my hall and rest and feast before continuing your journey. I should like to hear the story of a boy who can hold half a hillock in his arms without a quiver."

"No—no, you must stay at my manor," interrupted

Roller, "I have far choicer wines in my barrels and nobler ales in my stoups."

"This boy wants none of your wine," growled Erik, "that is the trouble with all the young men of the village. They stuff themselves with mead and ale until all their manhood is gone and they fear even to listen to a story of a highway robber lest they be asked to go and encounter him. Siegfried is of different rearing than these youths of the village, that is easily seen."

Siegfried smiled to himself and thought how proud Mimir would be to hear those words. The boy wondered if the village youths had ever learned an ale-rune.

"I cannot stay with either of you," the boy said. "But I wish to ride to the village that I may see men going about their daily tasks. I have never been out of the forest and I am curious to learn your ways of living."

Erik and Roller forgot their quarrel in their interest. Who was this young boy who had never seen the world and yet spoke with self-possession of worldly things? There was little that they could mention to which Siegfried could not reply—but he stared in amazement at everyone they passed. The boy was so absorbed in what he saw that he did not notice the curious glances that were directed in turn at him. He made a striking picture riding between the two odd riders, for Greyfell seemed like a steed of the gods compared to these poor steeds of men and Siegfried swathed in the motly hides of beasts was a figure to strike foreboding into simple hearts.

"What craft of men do you wish to watch—a smith's perchance?" asked Erik.

Siegfried threw back his head and laughed loudly, but when Roller questioned his laughter, Siegfried did not answer. It was better that none should know he was the apprentice of Mimir, the greatest smith of all.

"What then—do you wish to see?" asked Erik rather shortly.

The boy was serious again. The two men saw his face light up as he answered.

"I want to see a ship. When I reach the court of Hjalprek I will find halls and granges and wagons and all manner of things of the land. But here by the spray-soaked shores I wish to learn of sea things. Much have I heard of Viking vessels—all the way from the great Dragon, war-steed of the sea—down to the small Askar. There is the fast-sailing Skuta that is made for speed, the snake-like Buza sometimes manned by as many as eight men, the Knerrir, a merchant vessel. Scalds have sung of ships as they have sung of swords. They have given proud names to the vessels that brave the sea.

"What names?" asked Roller curiously.

"Deer of the surf, raven of the sea, elk of the fjord," cried Siegfried.

"Bah—fancy names," growled Erik, "I thought you were a lad of some sense!"

"Well, let us take him to the ship-sheds," Roller said. "Perhaps he can man a ship alone with his great strength and those of the village who watch will won-

der where he came from. The answer will be—'Roller found him!' "

"Indeed—Roller found him—humph," said Erik derisively, "Roller would have been a mile away from this same Siegfried if he had not been stopped in his cowardly flight. He is the find of Erik the Shrewd."

And Siegfried thought that the arguments of these two men were very silly. He remembered the ways of the bears and the other animals of the forest. When they had wanted to dispute the ownership of something, they had fought the matter out with claws and teeth and muscle instead of nagging chatter.

They left the main highway and walked their horses along a narrow lane that led toward the harbor. The damp smell of the sea and the loud scream of gulls told them that they were near the water. And in a moment Siegfried saw the long low buildings that were shelters for the ships not in use. A large ship lay on the sand ready to be launched. Several vessels anchored in the harbor tugged at their chains like impatient animals. There was so much to see that Siegfried could scarcely absorb it all. The long ship that lay on its side where it was beached seemed to the boy like a sleeping monster. Erik called it a karfi. It had fifteen oars for each side. Now the thirty oars lay about on the beach, strewn carelessly as if they were driftwood. The karfi was painted red and white above her waterline.

"Watch—they are going to launch a ship," Roller called to Siegfried. And everything was forgotten in

the excitement of the launching of a vessel that took thirty men and the most massive of rollers to send it skidding into the sea. After the ship rested safely in the water, the sailors put the equipment on board. The oars were carried out and the gilded dragon heads were placed on the stem and stern where they glowed in the sun like ominous beasts of the gods.

As they stood looking out to sea, they suddenly beheld a spot of light on the horizon. Nearer and nearer it came until Siegfried saw that it was a ship with a square sail. In the distance the sail was like a great luminous wing but when it came near he saw that it was made of coarse woolen stuff and colored in rude stripes of red and blue and green.

And now before they left the harbor, Siegfried was taken to the ship yards where many men were working on the building of a ship. The boy rushed from one group of workers to another and saw those that were shaping wood, those that were nailing the planks together with clinch nails, and he came to the rugged red-haired Olaf who was called the stem-smith because he made the stem and the stern of the vessel. It was a strange sight to see the bulwark of a ship standing on the grass.

"What is that part called that you are shaping?" Siegfried asked a busy fellow.

"The gunwale, my boy—," he answered.

"And is that one of the important parts of a ship?" Siegfried continued shyly.

"Now that question requires some thought,"

chuckled the mariner. "I cannot picture a ship without a gunwale and yet well I remember the last cruise I took. The waves buffeted us so strongly that they carried away the gunwale and part of the bows as well —yet we sailed on as gallantly as ever for the good part of another day."

"Were you ever in a real shipwreck?" Siegfried asked.

"Perchance, boy—we who sail the sea do not talk of the evil of it. We remember instead the thrill of the restless ship and the long grey horizons of water and sky. It is better to die in a witch-storm at sea than to rot away with a common plague on a lonely farm."

Siegfried felt the stir in the old man's words and for a moment he longed to forget his journey to his mother and join these ruddy sailors who sang boisterously over their tasks. Siegfried listened to the words of their song:

"Salt is in my eyes
Bathing them—
My strong arms fail;
My eyelids smart."

As the boy stood there, driven in his thoughts toward a world of salt spray and wind-blown voyaging, a young lad approached him.

"What are you thinking about so seriously?" The impudent voice interrupted Siegfried's thoughts, "You look like a lover making poems to his lady's eyelashes. Is she fair or is she dark, red-lipped or pale as a shell? Have you spoken to her yet or has she sent you away?

What is the story, my lad? Tell it to one who knows more of the world than yourself."

Siegfried looked in surprise at the speaker. He saw a slim boy who might have been the same age as himself. He wore a white kirtle and his hair was closely cropped. Siegfried remembered Mimir's telling of the thralls or servants of chieftains. The wearing of white and the cropping of their hair were the signs of their slavery.

"You are a thrall," Siegfried said rather proudly, "I do not understand the nonsense you speak to me of ladies. I have never seen a lady."

"He has never seen a lady—and where has he been all these years with his red-gold curls and his handsome form?" mocked the thrall.

And now all the rough sailors gathered around the two and tried to wheedle this battle of words into a duel of strength.

"Perhaps a lady runs when she sees him," chuckled one old fellow.

Siegfried felt the blood rush to his cheeks and he quivered with anger. How could he tell these ruffians that he was a Volsung and that Odin himself watched over him. They would laugh and call him more names and think he boasted of something he knew nothing about.

"Perchance he is a veritable babe in the wood and does not know about the world," teased the thrall.

And this was so near the truth it hurt. Siegfried swerved suddenly and picked up the slight figure of

the thrall, rocking him back and forth in his arms as if he were but an infant.

" 'Tis you who are the babe," he said with slow anger.

The thrall kicked and struggled but Siegfried only held him tighter in his arms, while the sailors slapped each other upon the back and vowed that they had not been so amused since the time of the last sacrifices when the mimes had clattered their bells on the stage and a harlequin had played his tricks.

"Let me down," screamed the thrall.

"Not until you have given me an oath of reconciliation," said Siegfried, for again he remembered Mimir's teachings. When a man spoke ill of another it was called tongue-nid and he could be punished by outlawry if he did not take back what he had said.

"Very well, then. Let me down and I will beg your pardon," said the thrall in a subdued voice.

Loud was the laughter when the thin boy in white made obeisance to the sturdy lad in the skins of wild beasts. Then, because Siegfried was interested in the first boy of his own age he had ever seen, he spoke gently to the thrall.

"What is your name and where are you going? I see that your horse is tied to the tree yonder. Perhaps we can journey together?"

The thrall looked sulky for a moment, and then he too broke into smiles, for Siegfried had a winning manner and after all the thrall had to admit himself fairly outdone.

"My name is Alf and I am thrall to the good King Hjalprek. He sent me on an errand to the ship yards and I must start back this very night—a scarey journey." Alf shivered and even the rough sailors did not laugh at him now, for the forest was a great gloom at the side of the highway and it was said that highway robbers had built their houses and dens almost upon the roadside, for even these men were as afraid of the woods as any.

"I too am going to the court of King Hjalprek. Shall we travel together?" Siegfried asked.

"If you like—but I do not think he has need of another thrall," Alf said somewhat loftily.

Siegfried's eyes twinkled. His first impulse had been to proclaim himself the son of the king's foster-daughter, but on second thought he kept up his disguise.

"Well, it matters not, I have a message from a smithy in the forest to take to the king. If I am not accepted as a thrall, I will at least have seen the court and the king."

"And the ladies—!" added Alf mischievously.

Siegfried made a move to lift the young page off his feet again, but Alf was off in a second to mount his brown mare.

"Will you not stay the night at my hall?" Roller pleaded, for he had taken a liking to this young boy of the forest.

"Nay—I must be off with Alf. He says that if we ride swiftly we will reach the court at high noon tomorrow."

Then Erik who had surveyed Siegfried gloomily for the last hour or so, rummaged in his woolen bag and brought forth some hard bread and smoked meat.

"Here—take this," he said crossly, "and should you come our way again, there is a rock in the middle of my path that I must go around to reach my door. You might be able to pick it up and toss it into the sea for me."

Siegfried was touched at Erik's gift, for he knew that this crusty little man was one who watched his possessions with care, even as some men threw theirs away with abandon.

"Thank you, Erik. If I return to the forest by this road, I will indeed come and rid you of the stone that blocks your way."

Then Siegfried ran swiftly to Greyfell who pawed the earth and neighed loudly with eagerness. In a moment those who watched saw the grey horse overtake Alf on the brown mare, and the two young boys gallop out of sight.

Chapter VIII

THE COURT OF HJALPREK

THE road that they galloped along was bright in the moonlight. It had left the sea—swinging inland to follow the outlines of the forest. One side of the highway was always to be the wood—the other side was varied; an open heath or dale, or the wet slough of some mire met the gaze of the riders.

"But you have no sword," Alf cried suddenly.

Siegfried felt a boyish desire to cry out his secret. He longed to confide in this comrade of the night—perhaps to boast a little of the sword Gram that was waiting for him and of the dragon Fafnir that it was to kill. But he kept silent.

"No, I have none."

Alf's face was pale—perhaps it was only the moonlight, but the quiver in his voice was no illusion.

"There is danger on this road, Siegfried."

"What is danger?" Siegfried's voice said dreamily.

"Stop your mockery," Alf's voice was angry. "I am brave enough to travel through the night for the good king that I serve, but I am not so brave that I refuse to recognize danger. There are well-known robbers between here and the court. They have built a den somewhere in the thickets near the road. They have

often stopped parties from the court and sent great warriors off on foot, lamenting their lost goods."

"I am not mocking you," Siegfried answered gently. "If the robbers attack us we will certainly find some way out of the trouble."

"Do not be too sure," Alf replied nervously.

For a long time they rode along the wide road. There was no sound save the clatter of the horses' hoofs and the rushing of the wind in their ears. Siegfried was alert and watchful—the more so when he noticed that Alf's head drooped and he slept fitfully as he rode. It must have been the middle of the night for the moon was high in the heavens and the stars seemed cut out of the darkness with the sharp brilliancy that is peculiar to the very depth of night. Suddenly Siegfried heard the loud clatter of hoofs. Alf started from his sleep with a cry on his lips.

"Who rides the road on a lonely night?" the thrall murmured.

Siegfried felt his heart leap with happiness. He was having an adventure. He might have been any boy of the world instead of the foster-child of a hind, sheltered from the ways of men. His eyes pierced the darkness. He scarcely knew what he expected to see. Men with shining swords and fierce steeds! Men with masked eyes and dark cloaks to hide in!

"Look Siegfried—it is a horse that rides alone!" cried Alf.

And just in time Siegfried flung out his arm to snatch the bridle of the runaway. He was a large

stallion, gleaming and wet with sweat. The horse was terribly spent and even when Siegfried had quieted him, he still quivered and neighed loudly.

"What do you suppose it means?" Alf's eyes were round with fright.

"Perhaps the rider is held by the robbers and the horse escaped," Siegfried suggested. "Could that be possible, Alf?"

"Yes—if the rider were a man of power at the court, the highwaymen might hold him for ransom."

"We must watch for any signs of a bypath leading into the wood," said Siegfried.

"That we may gallop past like the wind and no man stop us," cried Alf.

"No," said Siegfried quietly. "That we may steal softly up the pathway to the robber's den and free this poor fellow who has been unhorsed."

"That is madness," Alf interrupted, "it is no fault of ours that a rider has fallen into the hands of the robbers. It is—perchance—a sign from the gods to help us from doing likewise. What good could a boy without a sword and a young thrall like myself do against thirty strong and fierce men?"

"What Mimir lacked in strength, he made up in slyness," Siegfried answered.

"What are you talking about?" Alf cried.

"Nothing that would interest you," Siegfried said. "We must walk our horses, Alf, so that the sharp ring of their hoofs will not carry into the forest. Keep your eyes straight ahead to see that there is nothing out of

the ordinary on the road. I will look for a sign of a break in the thickets."

Alf obeyed Siegfried's instructions. He felt as if some chieftain were commanding him. There was an imperious note of authority in Siegfried's voice.

"Ah—the stranger's horse begins to shy—it is probably near here that we may look for the path."

"You put your faith in dumb animals?" Alf said scornfully.

"I have always chosen my directions by the lift of an animal's head," Siegfried replied. Again Alf wondered at the curious ways of the boy at his side.

They dismounted and tied the horses to some bushes beside the road. Siegfried led the way quickly and quietly through a small hole in the thickets that Alf had not even seen. The young thrall longed to call out—anything to break the strange unreal stillness. Once he stopped, thinking he could not go on. But even as he tried to gain the courage to break into a run back to the road, he felt Siegfried's hand reach and clasp his own. Resolutely he was led on.

Suddenly Siegfried stopped so that Alf nearly stumbled over him in the dark. Ahead of them glimmered a faint light. It seemed to die out and then burst into flame again, and Alf saw that it was not the light that flickered but the trembling branches of the trees lying between them and the windows of a long low building. They moved slowly and cautiously nearer. Siegfried motioned to Alf to remain where he was and the thrall saw his companion leap for a

low branch of a great oak tree. Siegfried swung himself easily to a comfortable position in the leafy foliage, hidden from the hut, and yet almost exactly opposite the open windows.

Within the room he saw a long table. Around it were seated men of amazing size. They wore their hair in long curls and all had pointed beards. They were counting piles of silver and drinking from great stoups of ale. In the corner lay a man in a scarlet kirtle that Siegfried judged to be the kidnaped rider of the runaway horse. From time to time the highwaymen tossed bones at the helpless captive on the floor. Finally one raucous drinker stunned him with a large joint and the man of a king's court lay like a dog in a bone-heap. Siegfried clenched his fists at the sight. But he knew that more than strength was needed to conquer thirty men, all well armed. The boy studied the room carefully. There were wooden chests lining the walls and in a corner by the unbolted door were three sacks of meal. One was torn open and the fine grain had spilled to the floor in a little yellow stream.

In a moment, Siegfried joined Alf who stood trembling at the foot of the tree.

"I have a plan," Alf heard the words and yet could not believe that Siegfried had spoken. It was as if a leaf had rustled or a twig snapped—somehow the voice was a part of the voices of the forest. If anyone had overheard them, Alf could have sworn that the intruder would have noticed nothing unnatural.

"You are to poke your head through the window that is opposite the door. I will lead you around to it in a moment. Play the fool—say that you have lost your way and cannot even find the door to the house."

"Then shall I show my sword for battle?" whispered Alf bravely.

"No—no," said Siegfried impatiently. "This is a trick—not a battle we are attempting. Simply engage the men in conversation. They will naturally turn in your direction. I have seen through the window that the door is unbolted. You will wait until I take the kidnaped man in my arms and then run as fast as you can to the horses, making them ready for instant departure. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Alf said softly, and followed Siegfried along a narrow beaten path until they stood directly under a lighted window. Voices could be heard within—coarse laughing voices thick with drinking and eating.

"Count twenty before you poke your head through," Siegfried said.

Alf was afraid to breathe. He counted in his mind—and it seemed years instead of seconds before he reached twenty. Then there was a terrifying second when he thought that he was going to turn and run like a frightened squirrel. But he was a thrall who had learned to obey—and Siegfried had ordered him much as he had been commanded by the high-born chiefs of the court. Even as he put one foot on an uneven edge of the log that protruded beneath the window, Alf wondered who Siegfried might be.

And then the play was on! Alf felt like a performing mime as he pushed himself half-way through the small window and said in the voice of a country fool: "Well—fellows, I have lost my way—I have lost my way on the road and in the forest and even in this very house, for I cannot find the door."

The sudden appearance of a face at the window must have been a great surprise to the befuddled drinkers at the long table. They broke into loud cheering laughter. Only one who must have been their leader looked with suspicion upon the intruder.

"Come in, yokel, and make yourself at home. A den of robbers is more comfortable than a hive of bees at any rate. You might just as well have stumbled into an oozy mire. Would you have perhaps preferred a bottomless gully?"

Alf continued to play his part admirably, but one eye watched the strong wooden door. What if Siegfried found that it would not open?

"I say—are you by any chance pulling my ear?" said Alf as stupidly as he could.

"Or your leg!" shouted the robbers.

"Or the hair of your head," said the leader with some sternness in his voice, and he rose from his place at the table to come over to pull the visitor headlong through the window.

Alf felt his heart sink. Siegfried had failed him. Here he was being hauled by the hair of his head into the most dangerous den in the northlands. But before he submitted to the robber's strong arms, he looked

"Or the hair of your head," said the leader as he rose to pull the visitor headlong through the window

once more in the direction of the door to see if Siegfried wished him to give in without a struggle.

He saw the door swing open. In a second Siegfried was inside. Alf ducked back through the window as he saw what was happening. His strong-armed comrade had lifted a bag of meal and thrown it headlong at the robbers. The clouds of golden dust filled their eyes and their gaping mouths and tickled their noses. Siegfried had snatched the poor fellow who lay half-conscious in the bone heap and was off through the woods before the groaning highwaymen knew what was happening. Alf had beaten off the hold of the leader and dashed to the roadside where the horses waited. When Siegfried reached the moonlit road, Alf saw that he was not even breathing heavily and that he carried the unconscious load as if it were a cloak tossed over his shoulders.

"On—on—my good Greyfell," laughed Siegfried. He thrust the burden in front of him on his horse's back and seized the halter of the runaway stallion. Greyfell steadied into a long gallop while Alf followed the lead of the beautiful grey horse.

The last that was heard from the fiercest highwaymen in the north was a lingering moaning and yelping as if an angry pack of wolves were battling among themselves.

When they were a safe distance from the den of thieves, they drew up their horses and carefully lifted the wounded man from Greyfell's back. In the dim light they saw that this was some older earl of the

court. He was bloodstained and dirty and his fine cloak was badly torn.

"I can hear the murmur of a stream," Siegfried said. "This poor fellow has need of cold water on his aching head."

"I am afraid to go into that black wood again," Alf shivered with dread. "Indeed I will never believe I have been in the woods until I hear a scald sing of my deeds."

"Never mind—I will go."

Siegfried ran through the tangled bushes and was lost to sight. Once inside the forest again, a host of memories descended upon the boy. The hundred eyes of night stared at him and questioned him. He seemed to hear the voices of the fawns:

"Where are you going, Siegfried? In this single span of a day you have become so nearly a man that we scarcely know you."

Siegfried plunged on but the voices persisted. "Have you forgotten everything I did for you?" It was the cowardly whimper of Mimir's voice that pierced his conscience.

The boy found the stream. A part of it had flowed over and had formed a little starry pool that lay in the hollow of a cup of land. Siegfried bent down to wet the large leaves of a bush near him. They would be excellent poultices for the bruises of the old earl.

For a moment, he was tempted to hide himself in the forest and find his way back on foot to Mimir's cave. He felt very young and unimportant at the thought

of entering a king's court on the morrow. Perhaps Mimir's way was the best—to become a hero first and then proclaim himself a Volsung. Men would not doubt the word of a hero.

It may have been Alf's plaintive voice calling him to hurry or perhaps it was the sudden vision of a broken sword awaiting him, that made the boy toss his head and turn quickly back toward the road. He had dismissed his thoughts as a wild young horse shakes off its bridle.

Soon the old earl could sit up and speak to them. He was Vigfuss, Earl of Bitter-heath, and he had just left a feast at the court of King Hjalprek early that evening. The robbers had unhorsed him but his good stallion had plunged so wildly they could not control it, and the horse had escaped down the road where Siegfried and Alf had stopped it.

The earl consented to go back with them to the court of the king, for he feared another encounter with the highwaymen. It was nearly dawn when the three riders set off down the road again. And now Siegfried, who had laughed the whole night long and played at danger and mocked at death, became suddenly silent. The old earl listened to the chatter of young Alf—but he could not help wondering who this young and beautiful boy was who looked with stern eyes at the road ahead. Then, when it was nearly dawn, Siegfried turned and asked his companions a question.

"Can you tell me—either of you—where the battle-

field was where Siegmund the Volsung met his death?"

Alf shrugged his slim shoulders. He was only a thrall and knew nothing of the history of great heroes. But the old earl smiled and a curious light of gladness was in his eyes. He seemed to be remembering the glory of past days and wonderful deeds. There was a look about him as if he relived in some vision the battle of which he told.

"Another league and we shall be there. The morning sun will be over the field—like that other day when Siegmund died. I fought near him. Never will I forget the slashing of his sword as he cut men down like sheaves of grain. His hair was the same red-gold as yours, young stranger, and it fell in long locks about his shoulders. He wore neither helmet nor shield, for the sword Gram was always in front of him, a weaving streak of magic that nothing could pass."

"Then how did he come to die?" interrupted Alf.

"It was time for him to die," they heard Siegfried say dreamily.

"How do you know that?" the old earl looked long at the boy at his side.

"Is that not the way the saga goes?" said Siegfried carelessly.

"Yes—that is the story. Odin shattered the sword that was the great Siegmund's protector, and the last of the line of the Volsungs met his death."

"The last of the Volsungs, you say?" Siegfried asked.

"Yes—there was a son of Siegmund but he was de-

voured by the wolves of this terrible forest. Hjordis, the wife of the Volsung, was doomed to mourn a husband and a son on the same day."

"Are we coming to the battlefield?" questioned Alf.

"Yes—we will soon be there."

After that they were silent. The pale sunlight changed the mists of the early morning to shifting veils of gold. The birds sang in a wild chorus of ecstasy. A single pale star gleamed where the sky was still grey. It was the essence of every loneliness—old age that has stayed too long, a solitary thing lost from the others of its kind.

The highway turned into the forest for the last time. Greyfell and the other horses seemed to sense that the journey was nearing its close. The animals covered the ground as swiftly as wild deer fleeing from pursuers. And after a while the riders came out of the forest again and found themselves approaching a long level plain.

"Was this whole great heath the battlefield?" asked Siegfried.

"Aye—the warriors of Hjalprek alone were five fylkings, five thousand men in each fylking; and this great mass was outnumbered by the Goths."

It was a difficult thing to imagine—that long stretch of quiet plain, the scene of a stirring battle. Siegfried sat his horse as if he were molded and hewn out of rock. Only the breeze stirring his long silky hair gave him life. Alf was nervously still. He did not understand the drama of the moment. Only the old earl

seemed to know. He talked in a low voice of a picture he remembered well.

"After the horns had blown on that first day of the battle, the fighting began—first spears, then arrows and poles with iron points. Then the hand-to-hand fighting started and it was Siegmund the Volsung who led the array with his glittering sword Gram. Many a shield was rent and horses were halved as if they were made of putty and the blood on the battlefield was—unbelievably—like a red lake. I cannot tell you how many days this went on. I only know that whenever a series of nights had passed, the battle began anew. The horns were blown again and the drums thundered their appeal. We fought on. Siegmund was our star. His voice was laughter in our ears. When his sword was shattered, we were stunned with horror. It seemed like something that could not have happened. After that, the battle was done for us. The Goths took what they willed. By some miracle we had weakened them so that they did not dare go on to the court of Hjalprek where fresh warriors stood ready to battle to their death to save the great hall. That is why the seat of Hjalprek still stands."

"We must be off," Siegfried interrupted suddenly. His face was grave and he looked as if he could not bear to hear more of this tale of battle.

The old earl watched him curiously as they galloped toward the court. Alf was alert with pleasure at being home again.

"We will have a fine adventure to recount," he

boasted. "Thirty robbers single-handed! Perhaps the king will make me a chieftain."

The earl looked at Siegfried to see if he would match this boasting with a bragging tale of his own. But the boy seemed scarcely to have heard Alf's words. In a little while they reached a fair combe, lacy with trees and trimmed hedges. On the top of the slope Siegfried saw a vast hall. Other buildings were half hidden by the trees. A wall of stone fenced the estate and a gate of grilled ironwork barred the entrance. The design was the work of the craftiest of smiths. The earl led the way past the guards and they rode straightway to the hall of Hjalprek. The hall was built east and west, with the long walls running north and south. There were two doors, the man's door and the woman's door. Each was carved with runes and decorated with a fine studding of ironwork. When Siegfried entered the hall, he stood for a moment in breathless wonder.

The walls were hung all over with shields of gold and silver that were like a chain of giant coins strung about the room. The wainscoting was carved with the histories of familiar sagas, and brilliant tapestries hung from the high ceilings to the floor. Benches lined the walls and giant fires burned on the massive hearths. Buffers drew the smoke up through the roof. The hall was dark for the windows were high in the wall and very small. A blaze of candles flared in front of a raised bench at the end of the hall facing the sun. Candle-boys and pages with cups in their hands stood

before every high-born man. Who, then, was the king?

On a dais sat a beautiful woman. Her hair swept back from her high forehead like two dark wings and her fine dark eyes stared dreamily through the smoky hall. Siegfried knew that this woman could be no other than Hjordis the lovely.

The boy pushed forward in his eagerness. Alf, the thrall, motioned him back desperately.

"Fool—you are nobody here, even if you can conquer a band of robbers. Find yourself a corner as far away from the king as possible. After a while you will be noticed and then you can make your request to join the service of the court."

Siegfried shook off the boy who tried to stop him. Alf turned desperately to the old earl.

"Tell him to come back. He knows nothing of kings or of courts or of high-born ladies. He will forget to bow and he will trip on the trains of the women and even speak to the king if he is not stopped."

But the old earl did not call to Siegfried. He knew somehow that this was a moment destiny had ordered and no man could forbid. He would not have been surprised to see a miracle. He would not have disbelieved if the boy had proclaimed himself a god. None of these things happened. The eyes of everyone in the hall were suddenly riveted upon the intruder. They saw a fair form—a boy with shoulders broader than those of the largest of them all. His

height was perfectly proportioned, so that he seemed neither very tall nor exceptionally broad. The face was broad and high-boned with a straight nose and sensitive mouth. His eyes were so deep a blue, they looked shadowy and dark. His glance was as keen as a man's and not the idly curious gaze of a boy. The beautiful red-gold hair that was to mark him apart from other men framed his face in a blaze of glory.

Those who watched saw the boy walk straightway to the king. The good Hjalprek looked amazed. The guardsmen swung their swords aloft and stepped forward. A naked mighty man clothed in the motley skins of wild beasts could mean no good here. But King Hjalprek motioned them away and said musingly: "Your face vouches for your race, young man. It is easily seen that you are of kingly and not servile stock. There is something in your eyes and in the curve of your mouth that bespeaks a loveliness of soul. What are you called and why have you come to me?"

Siegfried hesitated before he spoke. Something had led him straight to the king, but now that he faced the grand old nobleman, the boy had nothing to say. If he declared himself the lost son of Hjordis, no one would believe him.

"Come—speak up. Fear does not become you," said the king more harshly.

Siegfried started. They thought he was afraid. He lifted his head proudly and said simply: "I am Siegfried."

Only two people in that great hall felt the shock of

that name. Hjordis stood up and held out a trembling hand to the king for support. And Hjalprek, who was known throughout the north for his composure, started as if he had seen some sign from the gods.

"And how shall we know the truth of your words?" the king said.

A momentary bitterness crossed Siegfried's face. He shut his eyes as if he were in pain. Then suddenly he remembered Odin's words, grieving at the quick judgment of Hjordis. The boy understood the terrible doubt that must lie in his mother's heart. He read the yearning in the voice of the king.

"There is a certain sword in the possession of my mother. It is in two shards, shattered by the god Odin at the moment the Norns desired its owner to die. The sword is called Gram, and Siegmund the Volsung was the last who fought with it. Another Volsung lives to weld the sword together again."

The face of Hjordis was drained of color. She stood like a pale priestess with transparent hands blessing the boy who knelt at her feet. King Hjalprek motioned the feasters from the hall. They moved out in rustling procession, their curious whispering like the passing of the wind through long grasses. The last to leave was the old earl. He stood as if he could not bear to take his eyes from that strangely grouped scene before him: —King Hjalprek with glowing eyes gazed at the son of Siegmund, and Siegfried and Hjordis found each other's hands—as if they were lost in a dream.

Chapter IX

THE OATH OF A VOLSUNG

FOR seven days there was feasting. The finding of the lost Siegfried was no common event. Hundreds of thralls worked upon the decking of the hall until it was regal and gorgeous with crimson hangings and curtains of purple dye. The floor was strewn with embroidered mantles, and the long wooden benches were transformed into brilliant divans soft with many pillows. High above hung twinkling lanterns and the corners of the hall held softly shaded lamps lit with oil. The censers burned sweet vapors, so that the room was pungent and fragrant with intoxicating perfumes. In the midst of the hall stood an enormous butt which held sparkling liquors. A steady procession of pages, carrying cups of gold, filled and refilled the goblets of the guests. The high-born received their drinks from the horn of a wild ox and the liquors were not simply a pure wine but were mixtures of many-flavored nectars and juices from foreign lands. The hall was heavy and hot with luxurious adornment—tables laden with bowls of gold and jeweled goblets and dishes of silver. The spicy rich smells of cooked meat whetted the appetites of the throng. Men tore the meat from the bones with rude fingers and swallowed great pieces of hard bread.

Gaunt, long-limbed dogs gnawed at the scraps that were thrown away. There was a continuous pouring of strong ale to wash down the simple food that was eaten in great quantities.

As the days passed, people forgot the occasion of their feasting. Men drowsed over the tables and if anyone had said "Siegfried" to them, they would have answered, "To his health" without prompting, but the name meant nothing to their dazed minds. The good king Hjalprek insisted that the celebration continue. He gave Siegfried bags of ruddy gold to deal out among the strolling mimes and scalds. Steeds were the prizes for the feats of running and jumping. Songs began to ring through the hall—songs of the line of the Volsungs and of this last Volsung who was to continue the godlike deeds of his fathers.

A tourney was set for the sixth day, and every baron and earl and knight who could hold a sword joined in the hurtling. The splintering of swords and shafts re-echoed to the clouds, and fragments of spears flew like falling stars to the earth. And none of this fighting took on a serious air for though the ground was bright with precious stones and twisted bucklers, the owners of the weapons laughed, for King Hjalprek dealt out weapons nobler than those that had been destroyed.

Through all this festivity Siegfried walked moodily. He was eager to be off. On a far, glittering heath a loathsome worm coiled at the door of a mountain cavern, awaiting the arrival of one who walked in

bravery and fearlessness. But Siegfried saw that the good King Hjalprek was happy in this celebrating, and he tried to hide his impatience and play his part well. The maidens of the court worked upon fair garments to take the place of the wild skins that Siegfried wore. He donned a shirt studded with jewels and inlaid with gold. The glances that followed him would have told him how much he pleased the eye, but he did not see them.

At last Hjordis called him to her. She who had loved his father, Siegmund, understood something of the sternness of the Volsungs.

"You do not like this gaudy display, Siegfried," she said.

"It is beautiful," he answered, not wishing to hurt her.

"Tell me what you really desire." Hjordis urged softly.

"I long to receive the shards of my father's sword, Gram—and go forth at once to the smithy in the forest where I was raised. When I have welded the sword together I shall go with the dwarf Mimir upon an errand that promises high adventure. I will not tell it to you until I have succeeded in carrying it out. Then I can come to this court a hero—instead of an unknown boy who has never done anything worthy of his birth."

Hjordis caught her breath and her eyes dimmed with tears. So she was to lose him even as soon as she found him. But she saw the look of longing in his face and answered:

"Will you do one thing for me? I have a wise foster-brother, one Gripir, who has the gift of foretelling. Go to him and ask him what you should do. Whatever he tells you, I wish you to consider. Then return to me and I will abide by whatever decision you have made."

"Where is he to be found?" Siegfried cried, eager to be off.

"Ride Greyfell down the road that lies beyond this combe. You will come soon to a high rocky mountain. Your horse will find his way to the top. Gripir sits there. He is old and full of tears. The world looks sad to one who can read it."

"What shall I say to the King," Siegfried asked, "to explain my absence?"

"Nothing—he is busy with the celebration and will not notice your departure. Come back this night, Siegfried. Tomorrow is the last day of feasting and it is then that I am to give you the shards of the sword Gram."

Siegfried bowed and turned to go, but their eyes met in a swift appeal. He reached out to touch her soft hand gratefully and turned away so that he would not see her tears.

It was good to step out into the cool air of late afternoon. It was good to hurry to the stables and find Greyfell quivering with eagerness. Soon Siegfried was galloping along a hard stony road.

In the distance a mountain peak arose. It was the color of burnt copper and Siegfried thought that the

last rays of the sun must be striking the grey rock and changing it to a molten mass. But when he reached the foot of the mountain he saw that it was not the sun but the natural color of the rock that gave it the glowing color. The steep incline defied them, but Greyfell bravely mounted the narrow path graven in the rock. When Siegfried reached the top of the mountain he found a house built there. It was made of the same strange copper-colored rock and looked like another peak jutting out from the mountainside. A dead silence caught horse and rider in its weird calm. There were no trees to rustle in the wind and the forest creatures dared not show themselves on bare slopes that harbored no hiding place of shrubbery. As Siegfried dismounted from Greyfell and stood looking questioningly about him, a door in the rock opened and an old man stepped forth.

Siegfried could think of nothing with which to compare him save the wrinkled fruits that lie on the ground when the frost comes. The old man carried a staff, strangely contorted and carved with runes. Suddenly Siegfried heard a voice—its quality was somewhat like the gentle tones of a woman—but besides softness there was a note of singular sweetness that throbbed in its depths.

"You are Siegfried, the last of the Volsungs."

"Aye—and you are Gripir, the foster-brother of my mother who is called Hjordis the Lovely. She has sent me to you to ask what life holds for me."

"And do you wish to know?" smiled the old prophet.

"I wish to know—only a part of what is to happen," Siegfried said impulsively. "Is that not what you would choose for yourself? What joy in knowing a saga's ending before you have heard more than halfway through it? I know that I shall be summoned at my hour of fate. Only the doomed ones die."

"You are wise," said Gripir. He fell into a deep silence and his eyes were like the half-open eyes of a dead man. Siegfried shivered as he watched.

"How much do you wish to know—it is yours for the asking?" the man of magic gifts said at last.

"I wish to know only one thing," Siegfried said. "Must I stay at the court of King Hjalprek and be a wearer of rich jewels, a drinker of rare wines, a fighter of light-hearted duels?"

"Is that all you ask to hear? It takes not the gifts of a prophet to answer you, Siegfried. I have only one counsel for you. You must take an oath at once. When Hjalprek hears that oath he will know that he cannot keep you with him."

"What oath—?" Siegfried said in astonishment. He had not expected this answer.

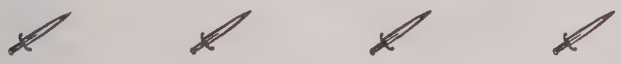
"Whatever task you shall choose for yourself in this world, there is still one other that must be undertaken. You were not born of a race of kings to forget them. The avenging of your kinsmen who fought their last fight with men called Goths is the supreme task I foretell!"

Siegfried was amazed. He would have left this deed undone had not Gripir reminded him.

"There is a promise that I must fulfill before I go across the sea," he said.

"Yes," Gripir again assumed the look of a man lost in deep sleep. "A sword must be welded and a hoard must be won." The voice of the old man died with the faint throb of a deep-voiced harp. He rose and kissed Siegfried on the forehead before he turned and passed through the rocky portal again.

The chill of evening came suddenly over the mountain. Siegfried shivered and stretched himself. Then mounting Greyfell, he rode down the sharp incline with a clatter and clanging of hoofs on the mountainside. Reaching the highway, he rode through the early evening to the walls of the court of Hjalprek and he saw the warm glimmer of lights awaiting him.



The seventh day was misty and grey. Merriment had reached its peak and the hall rang with the companionship that a warm fire and great shelter brings on a dark day. It was late afternoon before King Hjalprek appeared on his dais. A restless silence brooded over the hall. What was to happen now? What climax to a week of play and feasting?

Hjalprek lifted his hand for attention and began to speak in a grave voice: "Is there any trait of the northmen that is loved above all others?"

Stupidity registered on most of the faces before the king. Every head was giddy with great drinking and serious thoughts were far from befuddled minds.

Hjalprek scowled, but he continued to speak, answering his own question.

"The most binding thing in the north is a man's oath. The higher born the man shall be, the more sacred this oath shall be. What a man shall swear in the presence of other men at the Thing or at the Temple, he shall not be forgiven if he forgets."

"What's the matter now?" sputtered a red-faced baron.

"Who's he talking to?" a fat gourmand lifted a puffy face to stare helplessly about him.

"Must be me and S-Siegfried," said Alf, who was propped up against a bench telling the story of the robbers for the fiftieth time.

King Hjalprek went on speaking. His voice was dull with disappointment. He saw now that the riotous orgy of celebrating had been no true welcome for Siegfried.

"The last son of the Volsungs is found. For many years we have grieved, thinking him dead. Now we rejoice that he lives to carry on the deeds of a long line of hard fury-born warriors. For seven days we have welcomed him, and now on the seventh we must bid him farewell."

"Farewell?" the cry rang through the hall in amazement.

"Siegfried leaves at dawn upon certain perilous errands. Before he is gone, he wishes to take an oath in the Temple of my estate. He desires publicly to vow the avenging of the death of his father and of

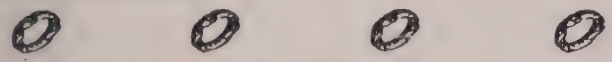
those other Volsungs who were tricked into death by the Goths."

"Does he go at once upon this errand of revenge?" said a high-born chief who sat at the king's hand.

"Nay—Gudbrand, he has promised himself to another task first. But if he lives through it, he will return to my court. We will fit him out with brave ships and strong warriors, and they shall invade the land of the Goths, meanest among men."

Hjalprek rose and with one accord men followed him through the door of the feasting hall. His words had sobered them and they spoke little or not at all as they made their way to the holy hill behind the combe where a fair temple stood. They entered the sacred building, dark and gloomy save for a mighty cross-beam of pure silver that Hjalprek had had built into the roof. As they gathered there in the gloom, the songs of thralls rose in a thrilling volume and Siegfried came through the door, his face pale in the dim light and his bright hair gleaming.

The oath was taken quickly and with little ceremony. Siegfried placed his hand on a silver ring that Hjalprek had dipped in the blood of a sacrificial ox. The voice of Siegfried was heard calling upon Odin and the gods Asar, Frey and Njord for help in his task and then he said: "I take temple oath on the ring and I swear to Odin that I will avenge Siegmund, the king, and the other of my kinsmen who fell in that their last fight with the Goths."



Late in the night, Siegfried went to the *skemma* where his mother's quarters were.

"Hjordis, the beautiful," the son of this rare woman of the north said. "Have you guarded the shards of Siegmund's sword? Is it true that you have in your possession the broken Gram?"

"Yes, my son." Then Hjordis looked at him wistfully. "Must you follow the sword's gleam?"

"I must," he answered simply. "I am bitten by desire to do great deeds, but my hands and my body are not enough to guard me in battle. Deliver the sword Gram to me. If I cannot weld it together, your question will be answered. You will know then that I was not fit to follow the sword's gleam."

So Hjordis took his hand in her hand and they walked down a long corridor to a chest that stood against the darkest of the walls. The queen bent over the chest and Siegfried heard the clink of the golden key and the dull thud of the lid resting against the wall. Hjordis turned and handed him a sheaf of silk and in the softness of the silk Siegfried felt the cold hard sword like a spine in a yielding body. He turned quickly to the lighted chamber and unrolled the cloth. The shards of the sword lay like brilliant jewels without rust or mould. The broken blade was like pieces of a splintered ice floe—blue-white and silver. The hilt was solid with precious gems. Siegfried felt his heart grow sick. What if he failed as Mimir had failed? What if he were not strong enough to weld the sword together?

"You are going away?" the voice of Hjordis startled him. He looked and saw that she had forgotten the sword Gram. She had kept it all these years for him and now that it was given she must erase the memory of it from her mind. It was hers no longer—as Siegmund was no longer hers—as Siegfried would be gone on the morrow.

"I am leaving in the morning—but I will return," Siegfried said cheerfully. "The years go swiftly by. When I am strong enough to undertake the fulfillment of my vow, I will return to this court for ships and men. You yourself will make me my battle standards."

For a moment it seemed as if Hjordis could not be comforted. Her smooth hands toyed with the sword that carried destruction in its wake. She devoured the sight of her son with hungry eyes. He was young and she could not keep him. He was beautiful and he was not to be hers. Was this what she had waited for? To lose him again!

Siegfried knew that she suffered but he could not comfort her. Taking the broken shards, he bent and kissed her. As he went from the room, he waited a moment for the word that he knew would come.

"The sword was the hope of kings—it remains the hope of the Volsungs," Hjordis said faintly.

She was right! Siegfried hurried into the night, spurred on by the ardour of her words. The sword Gram had given great power to Siegmund and Siegmund's son prayed now that it would give power to him as well.

Chapter X

THE WELDING OF THE SWORD GRAM

IN THE morning a great escort of warriors assembled. Mounted upon the swiftest steeds of Hjalprek's stables, they lined the broad highway in front of Hjalprek's gates. This was the accompanying train for Siegfried's departure. The assembly glowed in the sun as the bright rays struck the steel of their swords and the gold rims of their shields. The rings of the coats-of-mail reflected the light in thousands of dancing sun spots and the helmets were like the pointed flames on tall wax tapers. Richly embroidered banners marked the front ranks and as the wind blew they fluttered like eager birds. The escort awaited the coming of Siegfried.

Down the lines it was whispered that the good King had searched his treasure chests for the armor Siegfried would wear. There were words of a brynja as soft as silk yet strong as the sternest mesh of steel. Some argued the helmet would be all of silver and others denied it, saying a true Viking should wear a steel cap with a broad brim casting his face in gloom. And everyone knew that there was some mystery about the sword. Would it be a godlike weapon or simply a harsh rugged arm of power? Would Siegfried come riding like one marked apart by Odin or like a strong

man of the north? They wondered—and awaited his coming.

The clatter of hoofs burst upon them and the excited neighing of a horse sounded an unreal note in the stillness. They heard a voice vibrant with happiness and power: "On—Greyfell—forward!" And Siegfried was there—an awesome figure in their midst. Once more dressed in the rough skins of wild beasts, with skin shoes on his feet and a massive war-horn slung over his shoulders, he seemed the embodiment of primitive strength. There was almost brutal power in his bearing. His skin was the color of ruddy fruit and his golden hair curled closely about his head in tight, gleaming coils as if it were made of some hard metallic substance. His lips were unsmiling and the whole expression of his face and body cried out an impatience and restless eagerness. Greyfell reared and stamped as if he echoed his master's desire.

There were no farewells. From a small hillock above the road Hjordis watched her son. King Hjalprek on a jet black stallion stood at his gateway like one of his own guardsmen. Siegfried looked back just once—to the hillock where the wind blew the white and golden garments of a woman and to the gate where a king lifted his hand in a gesture of salute.

"On—Greyfell—!" They heard the voice of Siegfried ring loudly.

Greyfell sprang forward, racing with every fibre of his being. Behind him the shining escort surged forward like a mighty tide. Those who watched from

the great hall saw the company of horses gradually spread out like a giant wedge—the faster horses outrunning the others. And always the apex of the wedge was Siegfried riding his gallant grey steed. The detachment kept its triangle array for the first mile. The sound of hoofs was so loud it struck terror to the hearts of simple thralls working out upon the acres and meads of the King. And then at last, the wedge lost its shape as Siegfried outstripped them all and raced on alone, a solitary figure on the road with his escort stumbling far behind him.

The country folk stood in excited gatherings and told each other that they had seen a horse that flew instead of galloped. In the outlying heaths and hamlets, men wondered who the rider was until a certain landowner called Erik the Shrewd, found that the unwieldy stone that had barred his path was rolled away. He knew then that Siegfried had passed by!

So the news spread—Erik told it to an old potter who sat at his wheel fashioning bowls and ewers for the people of the village, and after that the potter told it to every man who walked by his open door. The tale grew with the telling until Greyfell became the image of a wild bull or bison and Siegfried lived in men's minds as half-god and half-beast. And sagas were sung of him. The wandering minstrels of Hjalprek's court entered the halls of other kings and chieftains and sang of that gleaming wedge-array and of the lone horseman who left his escort behind and found a pace worthy of his own horse!

Siegfried pursued his wild flight until he reached the still, dark groves of the forest. There he steadied Greyfell to a trot. They made their way through the tangled bracken until they came to the smooth cold road that wound through the wood like a silver stream. Then Siegfried knew that he was following once more the path to Yggdrasil's ash and to Mimir's grotto. The woods seemed more beautiful to him than ever before. The scarlet berries of the holly-bushes made the roadside gay and the moss on the tree-boles had never been so bright a green. Flowers bloomed and birds sang. Siegfried did not stop for sleep. He was caught by the spell of the forest. He wondered if he could ever forget entirely the soft whimper of a hind as she misses a fawn. Would he find that memories of the forest followed him to the end of his days?

He rode from moon to moon and at last the familiar landmarks of the glades he knew were everywhere about him. Sometimes he could hear the shivering and the rustle of the great Ash. The forest was dusky even at mid-day now, for the great tree spread its limbs and kept out the light. At last Siegfried approached the glade near the tree itself. Dismounting from Greyfell he tied the horse to a bush and drew near the haunt of Mimir with cautious steps. He longed to see the dwarf before this sinister little creature knew he was being watched.

Mimir's voice soon reached him, the high querulous whine that Siegfried had come to know so well. Through the blue haze of the glade, Siegfried observed

the dwarf unseen and his heart grew heavy at what he saw. Mimir paced up and down beside his well, raging like a diminutive demon. He was more frightful than ever with his spindly legs carrying his hairy distorted body and great head. Loose-lipped, with bulging eyes, the face of Mimir was horrible to Siegfried who had looked on the countenances of good men. Curiously—at this moment—Mimir was talking of Siegfried. He twisted his long stringy hair with his claw-like hands and mused:

"Breaking bow, or flaring flame,
ravening wolf, or croaking raven,
routing swine, or rootless tree,
waxing wave, or seething cauldron,
flying arrows or falling billow,
ice of a night-time, coiling adder,
sickly calf, or self-willed thrall,
play of bears or Prince's child!

Be never so trustful as these to trust."

Mimir chewed his long nails and pulled at his lips as he said these words. And then he began to sing his song again, as if voicing his hate and mistrust was a perverse comfort.

"Let none put faith in the first sown fruit
Nor yet in his son so soon;
Whim rules the child and weather the field,
Each is open to chance."

"What are you talking about?" came the impudent voice of Ratatosk from the ash-tree.

"The thankless child. Gone—gone now for countless days. My teachings were for naught. I could not hold him here. And who will kill Fafnir now and how shall I take the gold?" Mimir whimpered.

"Take the gold yourself," said Nidhog crossly as he gnawed at the roots of Yggdrasil. "What did you hope to do? Keep the boy here in this grotto like a moth in a dark cocoon?"

"Why shouldn't he have stayed?" retorted Mimir. "I raised him like a loving father."

At this there was a great clucking and croaking from the branches of the tree. The hawk and the eagle laughed in their strange way, but as Mimir continued to weep the squirrel Ratatosk was filled with impatience.

"Weep not, silly gnome. He will come back if I know him. Siegfried is not one to chase the wind. He will choose an adventure to some purpose. This errand of dragon-killing will not be forgotten."

"How do you know?" Mimir asked.

"I can judge what is worth being judged and Siegfried is deserving," snapped Ratatosk.

"Why did he go away then?" Mimir said sullenly.

"He wanted a sword, stupid," said Nidhog the worm.

"I made him swords and he destroyed them," Mimir cried angrily.

"And why were you content to send him forth armed with a sword that would not hold against a cavern wall?" cried the watchful hawk.

"Never you mind," muttered Mimir.

"Yes—why were you willing?"—it was the stern voice of Siegfried who questioned.

Mimir stared unbelievingly. Siegfried had come home—but what Siegfried was this? Instead of an uncertain youth, Mimir was confronted with a powerful man. The dwarf seemed to dwindle into a smaller and more cringing figure than ever before. He crept to the trunk of the ash tree and leaned his trembling body against its massive roots for support. With chattering teeth and a wild jangling laughter the dwarf spoke:

"Aha, thankless one—you ran away. But now you come back to Mimir's shelter."

Siegfried only looked scornfully at the pitiful figure before him.

"Speak up—did I not teach you the words of men?" screamed Mimir, tantalized beyond his endurance by the silence of the other. "Where have you been?"

"To the court of a king in the world outside this forest," Siegfried answered.

"What has happened to you?" Mimir looked anxiously up at him.

"I have learned that I am a Volsung and I have found a sword that I will weld myself with all the knowledge you possess to aid me."

Mimir turned very pale.

"What sword?" he whispered.

"The sword Gram, which Odin gave to the line of the Volsungs," said Siegfried proudly. Then he

kneeled down on the ground and unbound a silken sheath. The dwarf who crouched among the fallen leaves of the ash bent forward and saw two gleaming shards of icy steel.

"Look, Mimir, a sword at last to kill Fafnir and to make me a hero!"

"Must it be *that* sword?" Mimir groaned.

"And what is wrong with this sword?" Siegfried asked.

"It is broken," Mimir tried to mislead him slyly.

"And yet worthy of being welded together again," Siegfried said.

"It carries destruction in its wake—it killed your father and perhaps it will kill you as well," Mimir protested.

"I do not understand your grumblings," Siegfried cried. He snatched the shards from the ground and turned as if he could bear this petty argument no longer.

Mimir was left cowering on the ground as Siegfried strode through the dark door of the cavern. In the heart of the dwarf a new fear was born. The sword Gram would never be shattered. Instead of breaking against the horny skin of the dragon, Mimir knew that the sword was destined to live on for other deeds. This did not agree with Mimir's plans.

In a frenzy of distress the dwarf rushed to the Well of Urd and looked into its dark depths, hoping to find comfort there. The waters were curiously calm. Mimir bent eagerly over the glassy pool. But

what he saw made him cry anew and wring his hands like an old woman who has lost all that is dear to her. Mimir had wished for Siegfried's death in the killing of Fafnir, for he saw that the young Volsung would become more powerful—even without gold, than Mimir would be with the gold. His plan had been for a sword that was strong enough to wound Fafnir fatally and be shattered in the wounding. Then when the dragon lashed itself in a death agony, Siegfried would be destroyed, for he would have no weapon with which to save himself. Mimir's evil scheme was threatened by the sword Gram.

At dawn of the next day fires that were destined to burn continuously for many weeks were built in the smithy. Never had the bellows blown so high a flame —never had the anvil sung in such a wild way. Siegfried, half-naked, toiled in the firelight. His skin was wet and shining. His muscles stood out like cords. On the outskirts Mimir lurked and spied. Siegfried allowed him no part in the actual forging of the sword, but he asked advice on many matters for Mimir was the master smith of the northlands. The dwarf found that the truth was wrung from him. Siegfried shattered every lie upon the sly gnome's lips.

Instead of welding the broken shards together, Mimir said that the sword must be ground to a powdery steel and melted to a rivulet of fire. And this was a mighty task but Siegfried worked happily, secure in the knowledge that Gram would not disappoint him. So the broken blade was crushed into something that

could be wrought freshly again. As Siegfried shattered the steel, Mimir walked in a ring repeating dark incantations:

"I know incantations
Which no king's wife knows,
And no man's son."

But Siegfried interrupted his words, saying: "Be still, Mimir. I want no witchcraft in the welding of this sword."

Then Mimir sat down on a stone and sulked. But he could not be quiet for long.

"Siegfried—there is a trick of forgery that no one knows but Mimir, the mastersmith."

"What is it? The truth, ugly dwarf, or silence from you!"

"Why do you doubt me, son?" whined Mimir.

"Call me not your son," Siegfried cried passionately.

"Put the powdered steel in a mixture of milk and meal to forge it," Mimir said.

Siegfried obeyed him and for days the fiery liquid was forged in a red hot fire. At last every particle of dross was separated from the metal. The sword was ready to be shaped and beaten anew. More days passed and Siegfried pounded with long steady strokes, and so the blade grew under the guidance of the baleful eyes of Mimir, the master-smith. At last it emerged from the ashes and was ready for the tempering.

"Temper it in the Well of Wisdom," Mimir said.

They went from the cavern into the glade outside. The air was chill, for the making of the sword had

taken until the late autumn. The whole space beneath the ash was filled with a soft blue mist like a gloaming. The Well of Urd lay dark and cool and undisturbed. Siegfried plunged the blade into its waters. There was a fierce sizzling and hissing. The whole pool gushed over, bespattering them with the white spume that floated on the surface of the well. The sword was bleaker and colder than ever. It was the end of the seventh week before the blade was finally joined to the heavily jeweled hilt again and the time had come for trying its strength.

Perhaps Siegfried felt some misgiving in his heart, but his eyes gave no sign of it. His whole face was transfigured with a look of proud ruthlessness. He lifted the sword high and in the ruddy light of the cave it seemed as if fire ran along the edges of the blade. The sword was seven spans long and only a man as tall as Siegfried could have handled it with ease.

"Test your work!" Mimir cried impatiently.

Siegfried glanced around him for something to strike with Gram. He saw the hard anvil before him and lifting the sword he smote it mightily. There was a breathless moment when a dull clang resounded throughout the cave and they knew not whether it was the sword or anvil that had shattered. But the moment was gone and they saw that the anvil had been cleft down to the stock and lay halved on the cavern floor. Siegfried shouted with joy. With arms outflung, he pointed the sword above him like a flaming torch. Only Mimir was calm, for he alone knew the impor-

tance of testing a new sword in more ways than one.

"The blade meets the test of hard stone, Siegfried. Now let us see if we can cleave what is soft and fine."

"What do you mean?" Siegfried asked.

"There are subtler uses for a sword than cleaving rock, Siegfried," Mimir answered and the knowledge of the greatest smith in the north could not be doubted.

"Test the sword in any fashion you wish," Siegfried cried proudly.

"Come with me," Mimir answered. "I should like to see the blade tried in one other manner and then I will accept its powers."

Siegfried followed the dwarf willingly for he knew that Mimir was well versed in the smallest details of his craft. They made their way through the forest until they came to the same river where Siegfried had raced a fish and Mimir had taught a certain ill-advised lesson in swimming. Mimir took from under his cloak a lock of finely spun wool. He tossed it into the river. There the wool swirled into an eddy of the whirlpool. It spun round and round furiously and was continually before their eyes for the tiny maelstrom forced it to the surface of the water.

"The next time that the wool reaches this side of the eddy, put the edge of the sword in its path," Mimir said.

Siegfried obeyed his instructions. Leaning forward, he watched eagerly for the approach of the lock of wool sweeping along in its appointed channel. He had the sword ready in time. It scarcely touched the fleece

before the lock instantly parted, moving in two paths instead of one. The wool was split in two as surely as the hard anvil in the cavern had been.

"The sword is truly tested now," Mimir said. "No smithy in the land has ever turned forth such a blade as this. It cuts the strong and it cuts the fine. It gleams like gold and it burns like fire. Put the sword in a sheath, Siegfried, and let it see no light until it meets the light of Fafnir's eyes and flaming mouth."

Again Siegfried obeyed. The words of the dwarf were words of wisdom. Nothing must dull the blade before it met that final testing—the killing of the fabulous dragon.

Chapter XI

FAFNIR, THE DRAGON

MIMIR watched Siegfried anxiously. After the glorious moment of the testing of Gram, the dwarf had expected the next day would bring forth the journey to Glittering Heath where Fafnir's haunt was. Instead, Siegfried seemed to have lost his impatience. A curious lassitude overcame him and he lay under the ash of Yggdrasil for hours at a time, staring into the blue twilight of the glade. He was like a knight who knows of his quest and prays before starting upon it.

It was Mimir who was impatient now. He had waited for this moment since Siegfried was a small, naked baby as wild as the woods he had been reared in until that same child had grown to powerful manhood. Not a day had passed that Mimir had not seen in his well the picture of a sprawling worm guarding a hoard that he wanted for himself. It was intolerable to wait for Siegfried.

"Siegfried—have your dreams of other things taken the place of a vision I have kept before you since you were a child?"

"Mimir, do not question me. Let this comfort your greedy heart. What I have promised I will hold to and never has it fallen from my memory."

The dangerous sternness in Siegfried's eyes made Mimir slink away from him. And the dwarf was afraid. It was a new thing to see shadows on the face of Siegfried and veiled thoughts in his eyes. So Mimir waited the winter through.

At last there came a day when the whole woods seemed to awaken. It was a day when animals of the forest came out in the open and the birds sang because it was spring. The trees were covered with pale green buds. The wind stirred softly. Mimir lay beside his well, lapping up the cool waters like a dog. He heard the voice of Siegfried coming through the woods.

"Then said a crow;
It sat alone on a bough,
Why wilt thou, young Kon,
Kill birds?
Thou shouldst rather
Horses ride
And fell the host."

And Mimir scarcely dared to breathe as he waited for Siegfried to comment upon this song.

"Well—you have heard the verse, Mimir. What do you think it advises?"

"What do you think?" Mimir said slyly.

"Find yourself a horse, silly gnome. We go at once toward the Glittering Heath. I have idled enough. The time has come for the killing of Fafnir and the taking of the hoard."

Mimir gave a cry of delight and hastened away to make ready.

Siegfried was left alone in the glade with Greyfell. He stroked the horse with gentle hands and whispered a song of flight to him: "Ah, my Greyfell—matchless steed—carry me to lands unknown, carry me to further quests. Do not let the Glittering Heath—glaring heath of terrible fame—end the song of Siegfried's heart. Do not let the high red hills where the red gold hoard is hid, hide us too until we die." Siegfried's voice was a low murmurous chant. The soft eyes of the horse looked at his master with the intelligence of a human being. Siegfried kissed Greyfell between his eyes. It was the only tender gesture he had ever made.

When Mimir came forth, mounted on a shining little mare, he found Siegfried upon Greyfell. Mimir searched the face of his companion anxiously but he saw again that Siegfried's eyes were veiled and an expression of restraint played about his stern mouth. For a long time the two were to ride silently together.

The road was between mountains and it wound toward more mountains. The rocky peaks were like high-washed billows of the sea. The way was hard going but Siegfried did not notice this because Greyfell carried him lightly over the steepest climbs while Mimir was forced to dismount at times and lead his mare up the mountainside. Siegfried finally spoke—it was to ask certain questions of the hoard.

"When Fafnir is once dead, it means then that we have but to enter the mountain and find the gold?" Siegfried said.

"Not quite so simply," Mimir answered. "The

mountainside, as I have told you, is the home of the Nibelung dwarfs who are called children of the mist. Alberich heads them, taking his orders from Fafnir. All they have done for many years is to play with the gold—increasing it by magic means and creating marvelous jeweled ornaments from it. They may not willingly give up this hoard without a struggle. But they are a reasonable folk and once conquered will work for you or for me even as they have worked for Fafnir. The gold is as safe with them as it would be in a castle treasure room surrounded by many guards."

The thought of further barriers before the gold was reached filled Siegfried with zest. Not once did the thought cross his mind that he might not live to carry on a further duel with the Nibelung children. He pictured the battle—a haunting mysterious combat of mist-hidden faces and ghostly mocking voices. Once he had been caught in a fog near the seacoast. He remembered the marvel of his own confusion in groves that he could have sworn he knew as well as the grove where he had lived. Perhaps the mist that the Nibelungs used for their weapon would resemble that fog. It was this battle that Siegfried looked forward to—he tried not to think of the combat with the slimy dragon that must come first.

At last in the distance they saw a mountain different from the rest. It was not as high but broader and steeper than any of the others. It looked like a great pile of grey bones. The rock was absolutely bare and there was no sign of anything green growing there.

Without questioning Mimir, Siegfried knew that the plain they crossed was the Glittering Heath and that this stark rock was the Nibelung mountain where Fafnir hid in his lair. The Heath itself was suggestive of its owner. Serpentine grasses grew tall and slimy in the marshy ground. At one end of the heath ran a murky river. They saw that a channel reached from the river to the mountain. It was a curiously rounded indentation as if someone had dragged a giant tree trunk through the yielding mire. They thought nothing of this until they reached the hill of rock and found that the channel continued on—a road in the stone, smooth and deep and hollow.

They puzzled over this phenomenon for a moment. No element of nature had worn the rock down in a groove so perfectly fashioned. It was Mimir who guessed its meaning for the ways of the dwarf were subtle and thus could he read the subtleties of all things.

"This is the mark of Fafnir's great body as he wends his way from the mountaintop to the murky stream of water at the other end of the heath. By the greatest good luck we have stumbled upon it, Siegfried. It suggests a way to conquer the dragon."

"What way?" Siegfried was straightforward in his thoughts. He had pictured a duel facing the mighty monster, and not some sly stealing up upon his enemy.

"You will never kill the dragon Fafnir by meeting him face to face," Mimir said. "From his mouth he spews forth a foul poison that eats your skin even as it touches it. He can uproot trees by the thrashing of his

tail and his weight is so great he can make a bed for himself in rock as you have seen. Meet the monster as you meet a warrior and you die in any of these ways—crushed to a pulp, or tossed until your bones crack against each other, or made the meal of this horrid worm."

Siegfried shivered with distaste, but his eyes were still fearless as he turned to Mimir.

"What can we do, then? You have brought me here knowing these things and yet you must have thought that there was some chance of vanquishing the dragon."

"The dragon has a heart—as vulnerable as your own," Mimir said thoughtfully. "Reach his heart with the sword Gram and your battle is won."

"Where does his heart lie?" Siegfried said.

"It lies below his white throat within that part of him that crawls along the ground. His flesh is the color of a damp grey puffball, the belly of a fish, the underside of a log, in this spot that never sees the light."

"And yet if I crawl beneath him I will be crushed," Siegfried mused.

"There is a way that you won't be crushed," Mimir said. "This channel has given me the clue. You must dig a deep pit just large enough for you to stand in. The pit is to be in the channel near the river. It will be so small a hole that to Fafnir's eyes it will look like nothing but a dark spot. He will crawl over it and when the pale grey of his underside is above you, you will thrust your sword through to his heart."

Siegfried thought for a moment. It was the ugliest scheme he had ever taken part in. He hated it passionately and he longed to refuse to fight so cowardly a battle. But he knew that Mimir saw things truthfully. If the dwarf said that he could not kill Fafnir in any ordinary form of duel, it was so.

"I should like to spy upon the dragon before I meet him," Siegfried said.

But Mimir denied him this, saying that Fafnir had eyes in every part of him and he would detect their hiding place. So Siegfried obeyed and sent Greyfell off with Mimir to the other end of the heath while he himself set about digging a pit with his sword at the bottom of the trench where Fafnir came daily down to the stream to drink.

Siegfried had been digging for a long time and at last he satisfied himself that the pit was deep enough for him to stand without touching the dragon's body as it moved on its course above him. He jumped from the pit and looked about him to see where Mimir had gone. The heath was bathed in dusk. The mountain wall rose like a slatey cloud. Near the mountain top a glow of light came from behind a ridge of rock. Siegfried guessed that this must be the reflection of the fiery mouth of the dragon. Everything was peaceful and still. Siegfried paced restlessly up and down. He felt as if he were waiting for a storm to break.

As he stood there in the dusk, thoughtfully and courageously waiting, a figure moved toward him. It was an old man wearing a long mantle and a dark

brimmed hat. He approached Siegfried so gently that the boy looked up and saw him without having heard him come. Siegfried did not fear, for he knew that this was Odin who stood before him, once more in the guise of a wanderer.

"Siegfried—you have had sorry council from Mimir. If you dig but one pit all the blood of the dragon will gush down and cover you and you will drown therein even as a man dies when he cannot breath under water."

Siegfried hung his head when he learned of his stupidity. He felt no hatred of Mimir for this trickery but rather a profound disdain that he had not seen through the plot. He saw it all now—why Mimir had not cared whether Siegfried owned a sword that would stand against the dragon's hide or not. The dwarf had wished not only for Fafnir's death but Siegfried's own death as well.

"Do not be discouraged," the Wanderer continued. "Mimir's idea of a pit was a good one, but he did not tell you the whole of the plan because he did not wish you to escape. You must dig a trench from your pit to another pit and from thence to the safety of the earth above ground."

"Will I have time to do this before the dragon comes this way?" Siegfried asked.

"The hour chosen by Fafnir to drag himself along this path to the river is early dawn. You have a whole night ahead of you. It would be well to rest a little if you can."

Siegfried smiled gratefully at the old man. Odin touched the brim of his hat in a gesture of farewell. He vanished as he had come, as swiftly and quietly as the passing of the wind.

Siegfried toiled again to dig a trench and another pit where he might race to safety ahead of the river of blood that would follow the death stroke. The ground was heavy and wet and the boy soon tore off his rawhide jacket. He labored for a long time and when the cold moon rose high in the heavens its gleam showed his body shining with sweat. Siegfried lay down in the bottom of the trench and he and his sword seemed both alike—naked and silver and ready for a fierce endeavor. He buried his face in his arms to try to rest. And as he lay there concerned with his own adventures, the distant fates lifted their hands and reached out toward him. A linden leaf floated lazily down from a tree near-by. It fell between the shoulders of the young Volsung. There it stuck fast, held by the moist warmth of his skin—and willed there by the three Norns.

There was no sleep that night for Siegfried. He brooded and watched the starry sky as he waited for the streaks of dawn to appear. He saw the sky lighten until it was a soft grey that might have been early evening as well as early day. He heard a distant groaning and rumbling. Hurrying into the pit that was dug beneath the muddy groove where Fafnir came, Siegfried stood with his sword ready for that moment when the body of the dragon pushed its way over his head.

The waiting was more fearful than if he could have faced the beast. The earth shook and the air was filled with a strong smell of sulphur from the vast cavity of the dragon's mouth. Fumes of smoke floated ahead of the dragon as he made his way to the watering place, warning Siegfried of his coming. Suddenly it seemed to Siegfried as if the light of day had been blotted out by an immediate night covering all things. The sky —now softly pink—above the pit was lost, first in yellowish fumes and then in a slimy black undulating body. Siegfried felt no fear. He was calm and alert, watching for the greyish white spot that marked the place where Fafnir's heart was hidden. Simultaneously he saw and thrust. The deluge of blood that covered him from head to foot made his body burn like fire so that he instinctively drew back and found himself in the safety of the trench that led to the other pit and the fair earth again. The dragon's blood had touched every part of Siegfried's body save the spot between his shoulders where a linden leaf had fallen.

Siegfried stayed in the other pit until the most fearful of Fafnir's death thrashing was over. He saw the grasses uprooted and flung into the air. He heard the bubbling of the stream as the poisonous venom from the dragon's mouth spouted into it. At last Siegfried raised himself cautiously from the pit and turned to see what manner of thing he had slain.

He saw a creature that seemed made of countless coils. It was doubled into thick and loathsome folds, with a tail that lifted itself in winding whorls like a

continuously moving spiral. From a yawning mouth of fire a three-forked tongue flickered and leaped like the tentacle of a deep-sea monster. There were jagged teeth that seemed the least of dangers beside the countless subtle terrors of spouting poison and gaseous vapors that fumed from its mouth and tail. The body of the beast was so heavy and armored with such scaly horn that Siegfried could see how easily the channel must have been hollowed in the ground. Had an army of men beaten its path with iron weapons, it would have been much the same as the moving of Fafnir's body over the rock.

Even yet the dragon unwound its tail in many directions, uprooting trees and spiraling to heaven in a terrible appeal to the gods for help. Siegfried dared at last to come near the dying beast.

"Who are you?" Fafnir said when he saw the strong naked fighter before him. "Who is your father and what is your kin that were so hardy they could bear one who held a weapon against me to my undoing?"

Siegfried remembered that a dying man could throw a curse upon his enemy, so he failed to answer Fafnir's question.

"Unknown to men is my kin," he said.

Fafnir raised his head in fury once again. "Fear not —I will not harm you. It is too late, and besides, the ring of Andvari carries its curse of death to you. Do not lie to Fafnir. Tell who you are and who egged you on to this deed? How did you dare to come before me whom all folk fear?"

Siegfried answered: "My name is Siegfried and I am called the last of the Volsungs. A hardy heart urged me on to this deed and this sharp sword stood me in good stead in the doing of the deed as you well know."

Fafnir looked more fearful than ever. "You lie to me, for the Volsungs are all dead. You could not have come upon this quest alone and you have no father to have urged you. Tell me before I die what dishonest soul urged you to this deed and yet did not attend you in the fight?"

Siegfried refused to speak. He did not wish to hide behind Mimir in this battle. Let Fafnir die without ever knowing that his own brother planned the deed. But as so often happens, in the moment of death all things become clear and every mystery is solved. Fafnir cried out:

"Mimir, my brother, has wrought my end and it gladdens my heart that he will cause yours likewise."

"And what is it all for—gold and treasure that has brought you no happiness?" Siegfried said sadly.

"I give you this counsel," Fafnir answered. "Take your horse and ride away as speedily as you can. For if you ride to my lair you will find other dangers stand between you and the treasure. Should you finally gain possession of it, it shall be your bane and the bane of every other one who owns it. The curse of Andvari is not dead. His ring will mark your death no matter how brave or good you are, for the curse of a dwarf lingers."

Then Siegfried answered moodily, "I would take my horse and ride homeward, Fafnir, losing all that wealth if I deemed that by the losing I should never die. But we must all leave this earth at the time the Norns decree. Valhalla awaits, a silver hall with Odin at the door. The Valkyries are riding in the clouds. Some day I wish to see them. I shall die—perchance by the subtle action of Andvari's curse but more than likely in some other way."

"Your words are proud and careless as befits the last of a long line of brave men," said Fafnir. "For them I will tell you something it would be well for you to know. Your body has been bathed in my death blood. Look at it."

Siegfried with some distaste surveyed his shining skin. He found that it looked little different, perhaps a richer brown with a more satiny feel than before.

"The blood must have been washed away," he said.

"Nay—the blood has been absorbed. Your skin looks and feels no different than before but truly it is as horny now as mine. Your body is invulnerable to any weapon. Men of the northlands are called by their most distinguishing feature—Harald Fairhair, Bjorn Blue-Tooth and so on—thus you will be known among men as Horned Siegfried from this day forth."

A moment later Fafnir fell dead—a vast heap of bulbous flesh and scales like sheets of iron. And Siegfried who stood marveling at the words the dragon had said, called loudly to Mimir to come forth from his hiding place.

Mimir walked from behind the bushes with a sullen look on his face. But the words he uttered were the words that bondsmen use for heroes. "Hail, lord and master, a noble victory is this slaying of Fafnir. None other has dared to cross his path and now this deed of fame will be renowned over all the earth."

"Mimir—did you hear what he said of me—that I shall be known as Horned Siegfried from this day forth, and that his blood gushing over me has made me invulnerable?"

Mimir was filled with hate. It was not enough that Siegfried had conquered but he had been rewarded as well. The dwarf looked with eyes of resentment upon the glorious bronze body of Siegfried. And even as he looked, his eyes were filled with craftiness. He saw where the leaf had fallen on Siegfried's shoulder and had kept that spot clean of Fafnir's blood. Here might a sword's point strike and kill. So Mimir learned the secret of Siegfried's vulnerable spot and began at once to plan his destruction.

"Siegfried, you have killed my brother," Mimir said gloomily.

Siegfried laughed happily. "But why do you say this sadly, silly gnome? Was it not your wish that I carried out?"

"Ah yes, but guilt lies on my soul," Mimir pretended to grieve. "Grant me a boon and do a little thing that it will not hurt you to do for your old master," Mimir whined.

"What is it?" Siegfried said.

"Cut out the heart of the dragon and roast it. I wish to eat it as a sacrifice to my brother."

Siegfried thought this request was very odd, but he bent over the dragon and cut out the heart and then he began to build a fire so that he might roast the heart as Mimir desired.

And Mimir wrought his evil plan. At the moment when Siegfried put down his sword to take the roasting heart from the fire with both hands, Mimir decided he would creep upon him and strike him in the one vulnerable spot on his shoulder. But a strange fate intervened. As the heart began to roast the blood bubbled and spat upon Siegfried's fingers. The burn was so great that he put his fingers to his mouth to cool them and at once he began to hear strange voices. These were the voices of the wood-creatures who had not spoken to him since the day when he went to live with Mimir. Once more he understood them! He heard the voice of all fowls and the woodpeckers chattering in the brake beside him. For a moment he was so overjoyed, he scarcely heeded their words, but then the full import of what they said came upon him:

"Siegfried. Behind you stands Mimir, ready to beguile the man who trusts him."

"The dragon has told you you are invulnerable but there is one spot on your shoulder where a linden leaf fell that was kept clean of the blood that has rendered your skin horny. Mimir awaits the moment you put down Gram to bury the point in this vulnerable part of you."

The song of a thrush came from across the marsh and the words it sang were:

"Wise would you be to kill Mimir before he kills you, for the dwarf is craftier in his thoughts than you are in yours. Should you outwit him this time, there will be another moment when he steals upon you."

"Will you let Mimir live to eat of the dragon's heart and gain more wisdom than ever before? He will spread destruction. Drunk with the power of gold, he will go out among men with his evil thoughts."

All this happened in the space of a second. Siegfried determined to test Mimir. He pretended to lean toward the fire and put down his sword at the same moment. But he did not let loose of the handle. At once Mimir leaped forward and reached for the sword. Siegfried swerved to meet the terrified surprise in the dwarf's eyes.

"Ah, Mimir, the time is unborn when you shall be my bane. Nay, rather one road shall both you brothers take." The sword Gram pierced the heart of the dwarf and Siegfried tossed him into the channel with Fafnir. Blood had filled the groove and Mimir sank in the sea of red. Siegfried stood appalled at what he had done. The fearful sight before him made him turn away in disgust. How ugly a death for Mimir! And yet had not the dwarf always known ugly things rather than beautiful ones? As far back as Siegfried could remember, Mimir had always been afraid, and had walked cringingly in the face of life. This thing that had happened to him was a fitting end.

Quickly Siegfried tasted of the heart of the dragon that he might endow himself with more than mortal wisdom, and strode swiftly away from this scene of horror. As he walked toward Greyfell, the voices of the birds came to him again and he paused in the heather bushes to listen to what they said:

The first was a woodpecker and he sang:

"Bind thou, Siegfried
The bright red rings."

And Siegfried knew that they told him to go and take the treasure, hidden in the mountainside.

Another woodpecker sang:

"A high hall is there
Reared upon Hindfell,
Without all around it
Sweeps the red flame aloft."

And Siegfried did not understand the meaning of this song, and so he asked: "Why do you tell me of Hindfell? What is it and who dwells there?"

And the voice of the birds told him of a glorious Valkyrie called Brynhild who had disobeyed Odin's words and let a warrior live who was doomed to die. To punish her, Odin had given her a sleep-thorn and made her a captive at Hindfell, a wonder of halls. She was guarded by a ring of fire that no one could pass. The chorus of voices said:

"Go there, Siegfried. It would be wise for you to take a part of the treasure from the lair and ride your horse Greyfell to this maiden. Much wisdom would you learn and much beauty would you see."

Siegfried listened quietly but the voices died out like the crying surf on the shore or the low melancholy sound of a rainy wind. The first thing to do was to enter the mountainside and see what foe awaited him within and what treasure was there for the taking.

Mounting Greyfell, Siegfried followed the trail of the worm Fafnir until he reached an immense ledge of rock. He saw that this was an abiding place. There was a great door with a gateway wrought of the finest ironwork and through the lacy pattern he could see the beams of a house that was dug down in the rock. Siegfried dismounted from Greyfell and tried the iron doors, but he found that they were barred fast. He soon realized this was not the entrance that Fafnir used to gain the inside of the mountain. No entrance such as this could harbour the passing of that great scaly monster lying dead on the heath beneath. So Siegfried followed the ledge around to another side of the mountain. He crept cautiously, hoping that he might come upon the opening unnoticed. He held the sword Gram tightly for he knew that therein lay his strength. Suddenly he rounded a jutting rock and stopped in amazement. The hill stood open before him. He could see great fires inside with countless little dwarfs working at the forges and he could hear a clinking and clatter of iron and steel. On the cavern floors were

heaps of tawny gold, and the scarlet and blue and green of precious jewels shone forth in the most fantastic manner from rocky ledges and heaps of dark earth. Long strings of golden coins slipped through the hands of the pigmies who counted the treasure, and here and there darted a singular little figure with a crown on his head. All this Siegfried saw before he was discovered.

Chapter XII THE CHILDREN OF THE MIST

WHEN the little men saw Siegfried they dropped what they were doing and gathered together facing him. Siegfried surveyed the diminutive forms with amusement. The pigmies were about two feet high, but their long pointed beards seemed to bend them still nearer to the earth. Their thin straight legs were brown and hairy as a goat's and curled shoes like Mimir's protected their feet from the cavern floors. Some of them had very bright eyes that were as impertinent and curious as those of the squirrel, Ratatosk, but others drooped like Nidhog the worm, heavy-lidded and full of sleep. The three who wore the golden crowns upon their odd, bird-like heads were in the center of the assembly and seemed to command the others. They stared at Siegfried and he in turn stared back at them.

"Do something about him!" he heard one of the crowned dwarfs order.

"Yes, quickly—at once, do something about him," the other crowned dwarfs chimed in. "Plainly—something must be done."

The whole line of dwarfs bobbed their heads in agreement as they passed the word along, "Do something about him."

But they all waited for the other one to start and so nothing was done. Finally Siegfried, smiling to himself, decided to help them out.

"Who are you?" he thundered.

They all jumped as if someone had poked them in the ribs. And the crowned heads drew together in conference. One of them said:

"That is exactly what we were deciding to ask you."

"Who are you?" chorused the dwarfs in answer to a signal from the leaders.

"I am a hero," Siegfried said mischievously.

"You know what heroes are for?" said the crowned heads.

"What for?" Siegfried asked.

With extreme gravity one of the dwarfs stepped forward. He held a golden book in his hand and Siegfried saw that it was made of thin sheets of pure metal and that runes were engraved on it.

"Answer his question," ordered one of the three crowned dwarfs haughtily.

"The gods first created the dwarfs, creatures of great cunning, who have dominion over the interior of the earth. They live in the hollow hills and possess unbelievable riches in gold and gems. They have been granted nobility. For their servants the gods created giants, less wise, but powerful enough to slay dragons and to protect the dwarfs. Then they created heroes who were made to come to the assistance of the dwarfs against such giants who proved unfaithful."

"So you think that I have come to your assistance?"

Siegfried said proudly. "I have had enough to do with silly gnomes. It is you who will henceforth obey my word."

"Where is Fafnir?" cried the dwarfs.

"Fafnir lies dead upon Glittering Heath and I have come for the hoard of Andvari that now belongs to me. I am called Horned Siegfried from this day on."

"Hero you may be, but the dwarfs are wiser than any hero. We will not do homage to you until you have conquered us," said one of the dwarfs.

"What manner of combat do you choose?" Siegfried said.

"Patience—there is much to be said before we kill you," scoffed the dwarfs.

A small pigmy came and stood in front of Siegfried.

"Hail, Siegfried," the pigmy said. "You have told us who you are. Let us tell you who we are. This is Alberich, the king of the dwarfs, and next to him, wearing the golden crowns of their birth are Nibelung and Shilbung, sons of a mighty king. They love the treasure of gems and silver and gold more than anything in life and they will fight for it until you die. Do you wish to surrender peaceably? If so we will let you continue on your way unharmed because you have rid us of the dragon Fafnir."

"If there is talk of surrender it shall be from you," Siegfried replied haughtily.

"Call the giants," Nibelung ordered.

Siegfried had never seen a giant. He stood his ground easily, with a smile of careless ease playing

about his mouth. Two things fortified him—the sword with its blade of icy sternness and the invulnerability that his horned skin had given him.

The giants came in lumberingly. Their great heads were hoary and rugged like giant oak trees in the forest, gnarled and thickly built. They were stupid creatures who followed unquestioningly every command of their masters. There were three giants—each a sworn thrall of Alberich, Nibelung and Shilbung.

"You are to fight in hand-to-hand combat with this hero," Alberich ordered. "Begin—Boar-tooth—and then in turn each one of you may have a thrust at this smart fellow."

The giants whipped out swords that had been made in the mountain smithy to fit their size—the longest swords that Siegfried had ever seen. Gram, that was seven spans long, seemed like a needle beside them. Siegfried knew he must be cautious of one thing alone —his vulnerable shoulder. It must be turned away from his opponents.

The strange and ill-matched fight began. Siegfried sang and talked as he thrust. The giants stood stupidly, striking out blindly in the direction where Siegfried was supposed to be. The young man danced all around them. His bright hair was the spot of light toward which their swords were aimed. It became an elusive goal. Later the king of the dwarfs swore that he saw the swords of his giant thralls actually touch the will-o-the-wisp hero, but as Siegfried remained alive without scar or wound no one believed Alberich.

At last the first man fell—a hideous death, plunging from a narrow ledge that ran outside the cavern to the sickening depths of the valley below. Siegfried had backed him to the dangerous position, and the clumsy giant had at once lost his balance. As he fell he groaned loudly and the mountain shook as his immense body clattered against its sides. The other giants apparently had neither feelings nor wits for they seemed unaffected by the tragedy.

But Alberich urged them on to further combat. Once more the duel of the giants and the dancing hero began. Heavy-footed and slow, the great man tried to follow the shadow-like movements of the graceful Siegfried. They saw only the space which he had occupied the moment before they thrust. The light patter of his skin shoes was the faint tattoo of a battle-drum that drives a warrior to madness. The slow anger of the giants burned and they were blinder with rage than they had been in their stupidity. It was an easy thing for Siegfried to slash one man through—to toss him over to lie with his ill-fated companion in the valley below. The third giant continued the dogged, purposeless blows that would never win for him a victory. Alberich called sharply:

"Enough—Boar-tooth. You began this duel—now end it. Return to the den in the hillside. A subtler means of battling than your clumsy spearings is needed to conquer this foe."

"But I am not your foe. I simply desire to be your master in place of the worm Fafnir," Siegfried said.

Almost at once a curious impenetrable vapour began to float throughout the cavern. It was the most bewildering mist that Siegfried had ever seen. It moved continuously in soft rolling clouds. It was not at all like the poisonous yellow fumes that had warned Siegfried of the dragon's coming. There was something sleepy and almost pleasant about this fog. Siegfried felt his eyes drooping, and he roused himself with a great effort. He knew that great danger lay in falling asleep. The shifting mist not only hid the countless dwarfs that Siegfried could hear moving softly about him, but it also reflected his own visage so that he saw himself in all parts of the cavern—dilated, multiplied, exaggerated. There stood a tall thin Siegfried writhing in a twisting scroll of mist that curled upward like thin blue smoke. Here was a broad Siegfried with absurd short legs that might have belonged to one of the pigmies instead of to a magnificently made man. Siegfried heard—rather than felt the swords strike against his body. Sometimes the point of a spear touched his hand and he bent it back easily. Although his skin felt no different, it was as hard as mountain rock. Time and again he heard a low moan as the sword Gram cut its way home to the heart of a pigmy lost in the mist. The sword cut as well blindly as it did in the full light of day. The battle endured for a long time. It was silent for the most part, with an occasional moan as a wounded dwarf gave up or the sharp clang of steel meeting steel in unexpected nearness. Siegfried was mystified. He was in no danger, but he did not

see how he could conquer the army of Alberich if the mist clouds continued to shelter them. He had half expected the vapours to clear away, but they rolled and billowed about him as persistently as ever. Sometimes the clouds lifted for a moment and he saw the onslaught of tiny men. It was a sight for mirth and not for misgiving. He could crush the dwarfs with one stamp of his foot. At last he lost patience with the battle.

"Where are you now—watch out, I'll step on you, little ants!" he shouted.

They mocked him lightly with laughter that might have been the voice of an echo instead of flesh and blood.

"Hie away—Siegfried—to where the heath glitters and the moor lies as clear as a brook. There you can see what you chase and chase what you see."

"Your laughter comes too soon," he warned them angrily.

"But not too near," they chuckled in retort.

The outcome of the fight seemed to belong to neither side. Perhaps it would have been settled with a peace oath—perhaps it would have been a duel of endurance rather than a duel of death—had not one pigmy sought glory and opened the way for defeat. His name was Melody because he could not ever keep still. His voice sang above the beating of hammer and the noise of all voices. He sang at night and he always sang of unimportant things. And so as he fought with the others, he forgot to obey the instructions of Alberich

for silence. He began to hum a gay inconsequential tune. Straight toward the voice Siegfried swerved, reached out his hand and grasped tightly the tiny spectre. He had actually caught a dwarf. He felt the imp scratching and kicking and biting like a trapped animal. In the struggle, the dwarf's cap fell to the ground and he stood before Siegfried, shivering and afraid. He had become entirely visible! The mist rolled and shifted all about him but it did not cover him. In a flash Siegfried bent and put the cap upon his own head. He scarcely knew what to expect but he knew that some clue to the mysterious fog lay in this cap that the dwarf had discarded. At once he could see everything. It was as if there were no mist and yet he had no doubt that if he removed the cap it would hang as thickly as a curtain before him. It was an easy task to tease the dwarfs now—poking them in the ribs, knocking their caps off and seeing their frightened bewilderment as they were caught in their own trap. It was not long before Alberich called Nibelung and Shilbung to him. In a panic they discussed the alarming stranger. And at last Siegfried heard the welcome sound of their beseechings.

"Do not kill us. We will do as you will."

"Take off your caps, then," Siegfried ordered.

They obeyed him and the hollow hillside was just as it had been before. There was no sign of the veil of mist beyond the thin trailing wisps that rolled out of the cavern and down the mountainside like smoke from a dying fire.

"Tell me the mystery of the fog," Siegfried ordered.

"We are called the children of the mist," Alberich answered.

"But what have these caps to do with it?" Siegfried asked.

"They are called tarn-caps," Shilbung answered, "a sort of fog-cap they are, creating a heavy mist that renders the wearer invisible."

"I will never be without one again," Siegfried smiled.

"Are you going to turn yourself into a worm to guard the hoard?" asked Nibelung.

Siegfried looked stern and turned to the speaker with eyes of disgust.

"Nay—I do not love this treasure, understand that now. I wish to be its master because another owner might use it to no good. Are you willing to be my thralls and work with it and play with it as you did in Fafnir's time."

"Yes—we will swear an oath of fidelity to any owner of the hoard if he but lets us keep the gold. The gold is our life and the jewels are our joy."

Siegfried smiled happily. He saw that he need not fear any treachery among them. They loved their craft more than anything on earth. As long as he left them with their vast supplies of unalloyed metals, their forges, their mining, their treasure house, they would be as pleased as the simple-hearted fawns were when their wise old mother found them a new place to play.

"I will leave all of the hoard in your keeping save a

few gifts that I wish to take with me on a journey," Siegfried said.

"Let us swear our oath of faithfulness to you," Alberich cried.

Siegfried looked long into the dwarf's eyes. For a moment he mistrusted him. For a moment there was a striking resemblance to Mimir in the other's face. But then he saw they were alike and—yet vastly unlike. Where Mimir had been crafty, Alberich was merely mischievous. Where Mimir had been wise, Alberich was impudent.

"Swear me an oath, then, Alberich. Let every other dwarf listen and each one of you shall echo the words of Alberich in your own hearts."

Alberich stood up, twisting his long skinny hands nervously, and dangling in front of the magnificent body of Siegfried, he said:

"I call Nibelung and Shilbung as my witnesses to this oath that if I should betray Siegfried and fail to guard the hoard, I shall be outcast from all good men and the gods above and the enchanted folk of the ash of Yggdrasil and shall be driven away by every man as far as the were-wolf is driven. So be it, as fire burns, earth produces, mother bears son, ships glide, shields glitter, sun shines, snow falls, fir grows, a hawk flies, a worm crawls, Alberich shall guard Andvari's hoard for Horned Siegfried."

"You must come with us and see our underground treasure houses," said Nibelung.

"Bring the torches," ordered Shilbung.

There was the scurry of many feet as the dwarfs disappeared through the fissures of rock like countless little beasts running for their dark holes. Soon they returned and their torches were precious jewels and pieces of phosphorus that shone like no light Siegfried had ever seen before. There was the silver sheen of moonlight and the wierd colorings of the northern sky. Siegfried had to bend his tall body as he passed through low winding corridors. From time to time they emerged in small chambers that seemed studded with jewels. They entered halls that were galleries of vases: gold vessels with dragon handles made of golden threads and the whorl design of a dragon's tail for the motif design. Siegfried found diadems of gold, spiral bracelets bright with jewels, long strands of amber beads and weapons of gold. Another room was filled with bronze—vessels and urns, pails, pincers, graceful horns with fancy chains of intricate pattern attached, knives of curious shape with representations of sun and fish and ships and serpents upon them. There were handles of swords ready to be chosen, stiff with gems and hundreds of spear heads, each made with such care it seemed created for some single purpose. When Siegfried came to the chamber of swords he held tightly to Gram, for it seemed to him that his own enchanted sword quivered with eagerness and nearly leaped from its sheath to show its prowess in this noble company.

When they had returned to the hall that opened on to the hillside, Alberich said:

"What fair jewels have you seen that you desire to take with you, master?"

Siegfried smiled. "Not many, Alberich—tell your men to fill the two chests that are made from single slabs of sapphire with jewels and gold pieces. For myself, I will take—a tarn-cap first of all."

They laughed merrily when they saw the twinkle in his eye. And they brought him the magic cap that looked like an old gray hood. Little did Siegfried know how strange a part it was to play in his life. He stuffed it unceremoniously into his pocket.

"Next I wish the golden hauberk that you say is the lightest and most beautiful coat-of-mail in the northlands."

They brought him the coat of mail and he donned it, longing suddenly for at least the trappings of a battle.

"And one thing more—," he hesitated with a mocking smile on his lips. One by one they brought him other treasures—a shield like a silver moon—a helmet carved from a single golden topaz. But he waved these things away.

"Surely you have guessed that it is the accursed ring of Andvari that I wish," he said.

Gloom descended over the hall. In the brief time that he had been with them, the dwarfs had become fond of Siegfried. They wished him no ill. But they saw that he meant what he said, and they brought him the bright gold ring that glittered like the highlights in a wild beast's eyes.

For a moment the young hero searched the lights of the ring with defiant fearlessness. But suddenly without warning, Alberich saw Siegfried shiver from head to foot, and a strange look came into his eyes as if he had beheld some dread thing.

It was time to be gone. Siegfried led the way to the rocky promontory where Greyfell awaited his coming. A procession of dwarfs followed him, bearing the two sapphire chests filled with gems. The golden hauberk flamed in the sun. Siegfried laughed and sang in high merriment. Greyfell neighed, impatient to be off. The noble animal pawed the earth and curvetted and pranced. Then Siegfried loaded the two azure chests upon his back.

"It is a great load for a horse," mused Nibelung.

"Aye—but not for Greyfell," Siegfried said proudly.

Then Siegfried took his horse by the bridle to lead him away and waved farewell for the last time. But to his amazement Greyfell would not move. The curvetting was done—the dancing horse was as still as a rock.

"His load *is* too heavy, as I said," Nibelung cried.

"Nay—his load is not heavy enough," Siegfried touched the silky grey horse lovingly. "Greyfell will not let his master travel on foot." Siegfried jumped on the horse's back. In front of him were the heavy chests, and yet Greyfell ran lightly now as if he carried no burden at all.

The children of the mist watched him with wonder in their eyes. Ah what a master of the treasure he

would be instead of the frightful worm who had brooded all day over his hoard.

"There is a mare tied to a tree down on the heath," Siegfried called back to them as he galloped away, "You may have it for your own."

They started with amazement. Whose mare could it be and where was the rider? Surely Siegfried had not brought another horse with him when he had Greyfell who could carry the load of two animals with ease! They hurried down the mountainside in a long winding procession. And when they had dared to cross the heath that was red with blood, they looked for the last time upon the frightful body of the dead Fafnir —and there beside him they saw the famous dwarf Mimir. He was the greatest smith in the northlands and a dwarf like themselves. It was his horse, then, and he had no further use for the mare now. The children of the mist were subdued. The curse of Andvari's ring had worked twice in a single day. With one thought in their minds, they turned and looked over the great heath. Shielding their eyes from the bright sun, they made out a faint speck on the horizon. The sun gleamed for a moment and the spot of light was like another sun. They knew that this was Greyfell carrying his golden-haired rider away. The children of the mist were sad. Would Siegfried too meet his death? All had seen him as he waved farewell. The ring of Andvari had blazed upon his finger!

Chapter XIII BRYNHILD

ONCE more Siegfried sank into a mood of lassitude and depression. He had killed and found no glory in the killing. His first impulse was to return to the court of Hjalprek. He thought that he wanted the cheers of the noblemen and the praise of the king. He would be proclaimed a hero. Sagas and songs would be sung of Horned Siegfried. Then when the feasting and rejoicing was done he would gather his army together and set sail for Gothland to avenge his father's death and the treachery against his grandfather.

But the thought of more fighting deterred him. He would wait a little longer until the sight of blood would not recall that frightful red channel that had been left on the glittering heath. So Greyfell wandered where he willed. The horse turned naturally to the forests, and riding through the glades one day Siegfried heard the grating sound of a woodpecker's voice. It reminded him of the voices he had heard when he tasted the dragon's heart. What was it they had said of a certain place called Hindfell?

Would a journey through a wall of fire to save a sleeping maiden be a pleasing adventure? From what Siegfried had seen of the maidens at the court of Hjal-

prek they were meek-faced creatures with little soul. But Brynhild was a Valkyrie! Did that mean she did not resemble at all the maidens of the earth? She had disobeyed the great Odin. How great must be her courage! But did she have the disposition of a shrew? Siegfried mused idly upon these things. But he had little idea of how to reach Hindfell and the thought of riding to a village and asking the way was not to his liking. So he wandered along aimlessly, putting the thought from his mind.

And now his loneliness became unbearable. It filled him with a proud bitterness. He would never confess to another how much he needed a companion. When he rode in lonely places he talked to himself and the sound of his voice singing its songs unanswered, filled him with immeasurable sadness. Why had he not been born to the ordinary ways of men—living in a court, learning his idrottir with the sons of chieftains and growing to manhood with brothers of his own or foster brothers sworn to eternal devotion and loyalty? He remembered the happiness of his life with the forest creatures—and yet the beauty of that too was gone now that he could not recall the language of the animals and their manner of living. A curtain seemed to shut him off from those early days. Sometimes he could almost hear the voice of the hind that mothered him, but always it escaped him. Once he tried calling and whistling the signals of birds and beasts, but his voice was like the faint indistinct echo of the real callings, related and yet subtly different from the true

thing. The thought of a baby raised in his early youth by the creatures of the wood began to seem like a story told of someone else.

At last Siegfried grew to fear his solitude. He seemed fated to walk alone. There was not even Mimir left. If he returned to the court of Hjalprek they might not greet him as kindly as before. Now that he was a tried hero and an invulnerable foe, men might stand in awe of him. They would think that a warrior —so ruthless—so strong—had no need of little companionships.

Filled with these thoughts of bitterness, Siegfried rode over the heaths and the moors.

At the top of rocky Hindfell blossomed a garden closed to the world by its hedge of fire. In the garden exotic flowers grew that had no place on mountain-tops. Tall and lissome trees made borders beside stately walks. A small lake glowed like a round perfect sapphire and rocks veined with gold were reflected in its clear depths. The fiery hedge burned noiselessly. The pointed flames were a blood red color instead of the bright orange of the sun. No smoke curled from the burning wall and the dry pungent smell of a fire was missing. Instead a rich perfume filled the air that seemed born of the flowers and captured by the flames. In the center of the garden there stood a beautiful castle with a high look-out tower. Sheltered by the castle walls was a strip of moss—green as an emerald

and soft and yielding to lie upon. There slept the most beautiful and wildest of the Valkyries—Brynhild the exultant. So great was the love of the Valkyries for this loveliest of them all, that they never left her unattended. Watchful and grieving there were always two with her—one at her side and the other in the watch-tower over her head. Silently they crept away from Valhalla without Odin's knowledge—there came riding Skuld and Skogul, Gunn and Hild, Gondul, Gierskogul, Skeggjold, Thrud, Hlokk—and all the others in their turn. They wore their stern helmets and coats-of-mail. There were times when they came stamping into the garden from the storm-clouds upon their wild horses. The shaking of the beasts' manes was like the rush of the wind and the froth from their bitted mouths was the dew that dropped to the valleys beneath. Hail fell from their nostrils into the woods. There were times when the helmeted girls came straight from the field of battle which they called Valol—straight from carrying the slain ones who were called Val, and the brynjas of the Valkyrie were bloody from the wounds of the chosen ones that Odin had summoned to the hall of the slain. When they came riding up the slopes of Hindfell or down from the clouds that swirled above the mountain-top, they shouted their cry—hoping its familiar intonations would awaken the sleeping Brynhild:

"Hojotoho! Hojotoho!
Heiaha! Heiaha!
Hojotoho! Ha!"

But days passed and Brynhild still slept and the Valkyries came riding less hopefully. When they were in the garden they felt sadness creep over them and they questioned their own helplessness wistfully.

This day Hrist and Mist were in the garden. They lay on the moss beside their sleeping sister. Their long dark hair spread out like dark ferns on the emerald ground. They talked of the fate of Brynhild.

"Mist—tell me the story again."

"She is very beautiful," Mist said dreamily. "She is the only one of us whose hair is copper-tinged and her eyes are slate grey like the sea on a melancholy day."

"And was she very clever?" asked Hrist.

"We used to listen to her far into the night. She recited all kinds of runes to us and she knew the names of every warrior in the north. We often were a little jealous of her, for Odin often consulted her wishes as well as his own in his choice of slain heroes."

"Then why did Odin punish her?" Hrist whispered.

"Two kings were fighting. One was Helm Gunnar, an old man of the north and the greatest of warriors. Odin had promised the victory to him. His foe was Agnar. Brynhild admired Agnar's youth and his verve and wished to see him in greater battles. So she disobeyed the great Odin's wish and smote down Helm Gunnar instead of the young warrior."

"Was Odin filled with wrath?" Hrist's eyes were wide with awe.

"Yes. It is the only time that the war father ever voiced his anger to the Valkyries. We all fled when

we saw him riding toward us in a black storm-cloud—all except Brynhild. She stood and faced him. I shall never forget looking back just as the black cloud came rushing toward her in the furious onslaught of Odin's attack. Brynhild lifted her sword and stood her ground. But it wasn't any use. She was beaten to the ground like thin saplings in the first wind-storms of autumn."

"But Mist—why didn't you all help her?" Hrist said.

"Ah, my dear, we had not the courage of a Brynhild. Odin grieved when he spoke the punishment, for Brynhild was his favorite. He gave her a sleep-thorn and said that she could never ride with the Valkyries again. She is doomed to marry a mortal. It is the most humiliating fate a Valkyrie can have. But Odin took pity on Brynhild and surrounded her with a hedge of fire. Whoever wakes her with a kiss will be a hero—for to reach her he will have ridden long roads to Hindfell and have endured the scourge of the leaping flames."

"Why do we watch over her?" Hrist asked.

"We watch for the hero, little sister. Should some ugly giant break into the garden by evil chance, he must be slain before he touches our Brynhild. That is why one of us stands in the watch-tower. But should the man who comes riding this way be worthy of her beauty, we must mount our steeds and hurry away. Now it is time for you to climb to the tower again. Search the plains and the far-off slopes of the hills. Watch carefully the long roads. If anyone comes this

way call me and together we will tell if he is brave enough to enter the garden."

Hrist rose and entered the hut. In a moment she was seen in the tower, a slender figure with her long black hair blown by the wind in joyous abandon. Below her Mist brooded over the story she had just told. She thought of the brave defiance of Brynhild and her single victory against Odin. Now she would never again have a victory. Marriage to a mortal—Mist shivered. And yet—should that mortal have no fear; dare fire; dare loneliness; dare the unknown—perhaps Brynhild's fate was nobler than they knew.

Days passed. Another dawn and Hrist and Mist would ride away, releasing their guard to others of the Valkyries.

"I had so longed to have the hero come while we were here," Hrist pouted.

"But think," said Mist slowly, "how much happier she may be asleep than awakened to the strange life that awaits her."

Hrist nodded her agreement, but as she climbed to the tower for the last time her cheeks were feverish with anxious desire and the light of an eager wish was in her eyes.

When Hrist first saw the spot of light in the distance, she thought that it was the sun's gleams reflected against a rock veined with precious metal. The flood of light gradually assumed a shape—Hrist saw that a man on a horse was galloping steadily toward Hindfell. Before she called Mist, the youngest of the Valkyries

covered her eyes with her slender hands and thought with all her heart of the things she would ask of a hero. He must be tall and handsome in a strong and glorious way. He must be true. Worthy of any fray, meeting all circumstances easily and surely, smiling at danger and unafraid of death. Hrist lifted her head to look again at the figure approaching Hindfell, and then she called softly to Mist who lay on the emerald moss beneath.

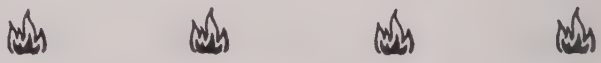
"Mist—come quickly—at once—he comes, the hero comes. It could be no other than the one destined to awaken her. Bright gold is his hair and he sits his horse erectly and at ease. The sight of the flaming hedge has not even made him slow his pace."

Mist hurried to the look-out tower. She put her slim hand, sailor-fashion, over her arched brows. And she saw him whom Hrist had called the hero riding the long road that led to Brynhild's closed garden. There was something in his bearing that struck immediate comfort to her spirit. This man was worthy of Brynhild —if any man on earth could be said to be deserving. Mist turned with nervous impatience. She seized Hrist by the hand and rushed her down to the garden below. They looked for the last time upon the body of the loveliest of the Valkyries, encased in metal, hidden from their eyes.

"We must ride away at once. This is a sacred moment for these two. We have no part in it," cried Mist.

The steeds of the two Valkyries leaped heavenward, shielded from sight by a white cloud above the garden.

And at the foot of Hindfell, Siegfried paused a moment upon Greyfell, at the sound of a curious rushing above his head that had no part in the quiet of the summer day.



High on the crest of the hill, Siegfried could see the hedge of fire. It burned with a steady intensity. There was little chance to leap the flames. Above the fire, loomed a shield-hung castle with a banner floating from the topmost tower. Without pausing to think of the ride through the fire, Siegfried drew the girth tighter and lifted his reins. Urging Greyfell on, he cried: "Ride the flame wall through, my beauty—on—on—it is a worthy death should we scorch in the fire and a worthy adventure awaits us on the other side should we live." Greyfell lifted his head—reared for a moment and plunged. It might have been that far-off day when the horse had proved himself by breasting the swirling eddies that the other horses had shied away from. No other horse in the north would have braved a sheet of flame. Siegfried heard a strange roaring as if the wind were upon them A heat that was like pain licked him from head to foot. Head high and sword aloft, he rode to safety.

The wonder of finding himself in a cool little garden kept Siegfried from exploring at once. He dismounted from Greyfell and led him to the clear lake sparkling like a sapphire in the hollow of rocks. They drank the cold water.

Siegfried looked first at the wall of the castle. The blazoned shields hid the sturdy logs of the hall. The swirling banner seemed to welcome him. He started for the great iron doorway. But something stopped him. Against his will, he found himself pacing the formal walks of the garden. And so it was he came to the strip of moss—as startling a green as the most precious emerald—and with the softness of some silken material. Lying there asleep and all armed, lay the figure of a warrior. Encased in a gleaming coat-of-mail and wearing a helmet that guarded the face as well as the head, the features of the sleeping warrior were hidden from Siegfried. He decided that this was some boy who had ridden to save Brynhild and perhaps been so hurt by the flaming hedge he could not find the strength to enter the castle and complete his errand. Siegfried bent down and lifted the helmet from the warrior's head. He started back trembling. This was not a boy, then—nor a man at all, but a woman with a head so lovely it made him close his eyes in bewilderment. Her skin was the white of certain velvety flowers he had found in the deep woods. Against this creaminess, her lips were a dark red. They curved down—like the drooping of a feather-line, lending an air of sadness to the face. The other extraordinary feature was the flaming hair that lifted the face from gentleness to a wild radiancy. Siegfried noticed that even in sleep the eyes were beautiful with long dark lashes and brows that curved with the same delicacy of the lips—sorrowful little half-moons.

Siegfried started from his reverie. He saw that the steel byrny that she wore fit her so tightly it might have been a part of her. He took his sword and with the gentlest of hands, rent the metal from the collar downward and the blade parted the armor as if it were severing cloth. Swiftly Siegfried swept back the folds of steel and saw that a woman in a robe of sea-green lay before him.

"Awake—it is Siegfried!" he cried impatiently.

She stirred so slightly he could not be sure that it was not the wind ruffling the pale green veils that covered her. He knelt down and looked into her face eagerly. He longed to see her eyes—to hear her speak. An emotion more stirring than anything he had ever felt shook him. He watched her, fascinated—the arched brows seemed to beckon him. At last he saw the sad curve of her lips. He was filled with a profound pity—why was she sad? What hurt could come to one so beautiful. His eyes were blinded with swift tears as his lips hunted hers. He looked into her wide gray eyes and started back frightened at what he had done. She was awake. What would she say to him?

"Who has won me back from sleep?" she asked in a low voice.

He could not answer her. He could only stand—wondering that he had ever thought her face weak and girlish. Her grey eyes met his with a wise candor that made him feel little more than a boy. Her lips had lost their sad droop and smiled in a strong serene way. She lay very quietly looking up at him.

"Who can you be to have rent my byrny apart and ridden a wall of flames?"

"I am Siegfried," he said humbly.

She sat up and leaning her bright head on her hand, observed his shyness with a whimsical smile and mockery in her eyes.

"Not Siegfried, the last of the mighty Volsungs? My child—you have not the air of a king's son but the bearing of a boy who has never been out of the forest."

Siegfried flushed hotly—but he thought he saw the mischief in her eyes and he answered calmly enough.

"Well—that is right—I have never been out of the forest."

Brynhild bit her lip with her white teeth and looked perplexed. She had expected to goad this youngster into a fiery temper and then vanquish him in a polite duel so that he would have no doubt of her prowess at war.

"Your golden haulberk is very beautiful," she said with idle scorn, "but you wear no other jewels, why is that?"

Siegfried's eyes glowed dangerously and then his mouth curved as mischievously as her own. He turned and lifted the sapphire caskets from Greyfell's back.

"I have saved them all for you," he said.

Then Brynhild laughed merrily and stood up beside him. He saw that she was of amazing height—nearly as tall as himself. Her figure was gracefully molded so that she seemed as slender as a young tree. She put

her strong white hands on his shoulders and looked long into his eyes.

"You will come with me into the castle," she said quietly. "There will be many things to tell each other. I will teach you and you will comfort my loneliness and grief, as I bear the punishment Odin the Warfather has bestowed upon me."

"Do not grieve—I will take you away—to beautiful places, to the courts of kings where you will be worshipped as you deserve," cried Siegfried impetuously.

She shook her head sadly. "Nay—you do not understand. I must always be lonely now, for there is only one thing I want in the world and that denied me I will take no other."

"What thing is that?" cried Siegfried.

"Something of no importance, my friend—I should not have spoken of it," she smiled tenderly.

"But what thing—name it and I shall see that it is yours," he said.

"No—it is something that even that very brutal and handsome sword of yours cannot attain," she said, mocking him.

"But I have always found I could get what I sought," Siegfried boasted.

"This thing you cannot get. I long to return to Valhalla. I long to ride my beautiful horse from heaven to battlefield and from battlefield heavenward again. I ache for that moment of glory when a hero dies in my arms and cries to be taken to the hall of the slain. I want to feel again the triumph of carrying

him, bleeding and wounded, from the clamor of the battlefield to the peace of the sky."

Siegfried's eyes lost their youthful conceit. The joy died from his face. He looked at Brynhild and saw her in a new light. He shivered at her power. She was a woman—gentle and beautiful—and yet withal she was a warrior—!

"Come with me and do not look so gloomy," she laughed at his serious face. "You did not think that I would let you fight my battles for me, did you?"

He did not know how to answer her so he followed her slowly into the shining castle.

As they entered the iron portal, she said: "Welcome, my friend. We will teach one another every lore of the mighty that we know. May the gods give us a brief happiness to linger beyond the sorrows that lie before us."

Chapter XIV

BRYNHILD AND SIEGFRIED

BEAUTIFUL days followed. Brynhild was a constant mystery to the young Siegfried. Sometimes she seemed as old as life itself, with her wise words and her moody countenance. But at other times she was younger than Siegfried had ever been with her delicious illusions of a carefree life. Great was her scorn for the plodding, serious-minded race of humans. Siegfried found himself carrying on royal arguments in defense of men and heroes—while always in his heart he knew that she was right: What the gods willed was ever so. Still—he insisted—she pictured men as blundering children. Surely that could not be! He strove to remember the gallant chiefs at the hall of Hjalprek.

In the forenoons they walked in the garden. In the heat of the day they stayed in the cool castle where Brynhild brought Siegfried beakers of sparkling wine and delicious foods. She was embroidering a great dragon on an emblem for him. At night they sat beside the roaring fires for the evenings were cool on the mountain-top. And they talked—or were happily silent, remembering the things that had been said. Neither had any desire for other amusement or companionship.

She stirred so slightly he could not be sure it was not the wind ruffling the pale green veils that cevered her

At first Siegfried longed to hear all there was to know of the Valkyries and of Valhalla. And Brynhild answered his questions glowingly.

Siegfried: What is the hall like? Odin said that it was roofed with silver shields. But how many men are there and what do they do and how do they live? Is it a mortal or a charmed existence?

Brynhild: Stop—your questions come as if you were a landsman buying an estate. I cannot speak of Valhalla as—made of wood—one hundred feet by fifty—seats a thousand and provides chess boards, wrestling, swimming, and all the idrottir sponsored by our really fine young men.

Siegfried: There—you are teasing me! I have asked the question wrongly. Tell me in your own way—I will listen and not interrupt.

Brynhild: You follow a sky-road to the hall—it is the night sky, dark as the stormiest sea—sometimes a crescent moon spears the night-waves like a silver fish —sometimes the stars are seen like flecks of phosphorus in a churning swell. I have ridden the sky-road when there is no light at all and I might have been carrying my tired burden to a grave in the dark underground instead of to the glory of Valhalla.

Siegfried: Is it a long journey?

Brynhild: As long as the thoughts that you have as you ride toward the sacred gate. There is an old lattice door and few have learned how it is closed on the latch. I think that there must be five hundred and forty more doors to enter the hall. You have asked

me how many live there—eight hundred Chosen pass through each door.

Siegfried: I have heard of a wolf that fights with those who enter.

Brynhild: The wolf hangs over the western door and an eagle hovers near. There is no fighting in Valhalla—except in men's minds. If they desire to relive the battles they have fought they look into the glittering eyes of the wolf and they hear the clamor of war again.

Siegfried: The weapons of men are taken with them.

Brynhild: Aye—as you have heard, the roof of the hall is a solid sheet of silver, shield upon shield. It is raftered with shafts and the benches are strewn with byrnies.

Siegfried: Do men live the same lives as they did on earth?

Brynhild: Much the same—every day old Sooty-face, the jolly cook, stands over Sooty-flame with a boar called Sooty-black. This is the best fare in the world. Few have heard of it but it is the chosen warrior's food. And Hrist and Mist—the two youngest and prettiest of the Valkyries carry horns of sparkling wines and the stoutest of ales. Each day we search the world for battles and when someone finds one, we are all summoned and go riding off on Glad One, Goldy, Gleamer, Race-giant, Silvery-lock, Sinewy, Shiner, Pale-hoof, Gold-lock, Lightfoot and the beautiful Gold-coat.

Siegfried: When you were not on earth you stayed

in the hall then—watching for wars and feasting with men?

Brynhild: Your voice is bitter. Perhaps you do not think that it was maidenly conduct? Come—my foolish boy, do not judge things you know nothing of. Confess that seeing me sew this silly talisman for you gives you no pleasure—and certainly gives none to me. We lived as you lived when you were a little boy—carefree, abandoned lives. In front of the gates of Valhalla is a wood called Glistener. The leaves in the wood are all red-gold. It is filled with delightful surprises. We played in the wood like happy children. From it we could see the earth—the moonless fells, the stark heaths and the little villages that storms could wipe off the earth and floods could cover. From the glistening wood, the world seemed very unimportant. Looking down upon it we were filled with a sense of vast superiority.

Siegfried: You really wish that you were there still, don't you?

Brynhild: "Ah, what jealousy—for my poor dream that I can never have.

Siegfried (petulantly): But why do you want it then?

Brynhild: Are you so wise then that you can order the desires of your heart?

Siegfried: I have everything that I want.

Brynhild: A dangerous remark—my friend—it challenges the gods.

Siegfried: I am not afraid of anything.

There were days when Siegfried learned from Brynhild as he had learned in the old days from Mimir. She taught him with a gay air of amusement and things that she said she spoke as if they had no consequence and Siegfried absorbed them easily. She told him runes of war and he cut them on his own sword Gram. She taught him sea-runes that smacked of salt spray and rudder-blades, of shaven oars and sea-hills, and the marvel and the peril of riding a swimming horse. Mischievously she lectured him with ale-runes—telling him to take his mead wisely and well. And of thought-runes, she spoke, saying that the fairest-souled and wisest of men held their thoughts higher than any other thing.

The day came when Siegfried cried boyishly: "There can be no wiser woman than you in the whole wide world. You have told me the homely things as well as the high things, to be good to friend and kin, never to swear a wrongsome oath, to be reverent to the sick-dead, the sea-dead, and sword-dead, and deal heedfully with their corpses. You have told me the mystic things and the godly things. Surely—again I say—there is no one wiser who lives. I swear that I want you for my own. Your words lie in my heart as none others have before them. Let me listen to you always as I have listened these days we have spent together."

Brynhild looked troubled. She said softly: "Come with me, Siegfried, to the castle hall."

He rose eagerly to follow her. At the doorway she stopped and said in a subdued voice: "Whatever I

may say to you, remember that could I have all men's sons to choose from, my choice would be you."

Siegfried entered the hall, a figure radiant with strength and joy. He walked like a king, his red-gold curls falling in long locks and his keen eyes staring straight before him. Brynhild led him to a great carved throne in a private bower that he had never seen before.

"This seat is for few," she said quietly.

He saw that the room was very beautiful, the best and fairest of hangings were there and the floor was covered with silver cloth. The throne seemed curiously rugged beside it and yet there could be little doubt that it was meant for one of power.

"Yet you have granted it to me," he said.

"For a brief moment," she smiled. "To taste power is sweet."

"Come—you must always tease," he said wearily. "This moment is too serious for that. I tell you again that you are the fairest and the wisest ever born. I give you all of myself—my faith as well as my life."

"It is wiser not to cast faith into a woman's power, for ever shall she break what she has promised," Brynhild said.

"You could not break your word—any more than a warrior could forget his oath," Siegfried said.

"That is why I will not give it," she answered sadly.

Siegfried stood up and came to her. He had lost all semblance to a king. His eyes were as bewildered as a young boy's.

"What can you mean? The best of days would dawn if we gave ourselves into one another's keeping."

"It is not fated that we should abide together," Brynhild said gravely. "I am a shield-may and wear a helm on my head even as the kings of war do. The most terrible battle is not loathesome to me. I can never look upon the world of men seriously. Some perverse mischief fills my heart and you would find that your wife pummeled your friends and hung your chieftains by their belts like shields on the pegs of your walls. Scorn and great laughter would echo in your court. Even should you overlook all this and take me as I am—a tempestuous lady of the shield—our troth would be broken. That I cannot bear."

"How can you say such things. My word is as good as your word and that word I trust above all others."

"The matter is out of our hands," Brynhild said simply. "I have listened to the gods speak. I shall gaze on the hosts of the war-kings and you shall wed a certain Gudrun, the daughter of Giuki."

"What king's daughter lives to beguile me?" cried Siegfried passionately. "Neither am I double-hearted. I swear by the gods that it is you I desire and no other."

Brynhild looked at him with eyes that were old and wise. It was impossible to shake the faith of his youth and the sureness of his power.

"We will swear a troth," she said at last. "But it must be tested. There are tasks you have set for yourself. One is the avenging of the line of the Volsungs. I will leave Hindfell and go to Hlymdale where lives

my foster-father. Seek me there in a year's time if you still desire me."

Siegfried put the ring of Andvari on her hand. He was filled with happiness and yet the recent sadness of her words lingered. He shivered as he said: "What fruitfulness would life offer if we were not together? I will go my way and perform the deeds of my oath of honor, but the pain of leaving you is harder to bear than the stroke of a sharp sword."

At dawn of the next day, Siegfried rode away. His shield was many-folded and blazing with red gold. The image of a dragon loomed upon his talisman—a golden dragon lying in a sea of red. The golden byrny gleamed and the sword Gram had never seemed as noble. It had grown wiser too in the presence of Brynhild. New runes were carved on its sides and the head of a dragon was fashioned on its hilt. The image of Fafnir was to go forth with Siegfried that men might know the hero as champion of the worm, that all tongues of the north would tell of Horned Siegfried in words of glory and wonder.

Brynhild watched him go. She stood in the garden, a tall fair figure wearing the sea-green robe that she had worn in her long sleep. She was merry to the last and she did not speak again of the doubt in her heart of the days that were to come nor of her knowledge of what the Norns decreed.

"Do not forget, my young hero, that there is a certain leaf-spot on your shoulder that is vulnerable," she teased.

"As if a man's sword could ever near my shoulder when Gram is in the way," scoffed Siegfried proudly.

"Be good to the fair Hjordis—she has had little of her son," Brynhild's eyes were soft with understanding.

"She will be glad to have me avenge my father's death," said Siegfried.

"Probably not as glad as if you stayed with her at the court," Brynhild smiled.

"But I must be off—as soon as Hjalprek gives me an army—the year is short until I return to you. There is much to be done."

"Yes," said Brynhild, "a short year for you—a long year for me."

"But there is a great deal for you to do too," said Siegfried hurriedly.

"Of course," but Brynhild smiled sadly. What would there be to do? Pace the peaceful grounds of Hlymdale, longing for two things—to ride with the Valkyries and to have Siegfried back again.

And then he was tender for a moment. A strange fear shook him. What if she were right? What if he were to break his troth? It could not be, but the thought of it sent cold pain through his heart. He leaped from Greyfell and came near her once again. Their hands met in a fierce grasp. For a moment it seemed as if Brynhild, the Valkyrie, was as weak as any woman—she clung to him as a shipwrecked man clings to the spar of wood that means safety. Her feeling seemed to rush from her body into his and they stood—frightened and loath to leave one another. And

then Brynhild proved herself once more a warrior-may. Courage came back slowly. Her mouth and eyes lost their look of tragedy. She stood serene and proud and said farewell to Siegfried.

After that it was easy for him, and he never knew that he had lived his moment of greatest weakness. He did not realize that he had been brave only as long as she had been brave. In the moment of her weakening he had not comforted her, but had clung to her—afraid. He had not taken her away with him at once—triumphantly overruling her will. With the return of her courage, came his, and he rode away feeling brave and strong and ready to conquer the world. It was so because she wished it.

Chapter XV

THE DREAM OF GUDRUN

WHILE Siegfried rode to the court of Hjalprek, Brynhild went to Hlymdale—and far away to the southward in a realm on the Rhine, others who were destined to mark the life of Siegfried made ready for a journey too.

This was at the court of King Giuki. The journey concerned a dream of his daughter Gudrun. It was this same Gudrun that Brynhild prophesied would be the wife of Siegfried.

Gudrun was a slim maiden with the figure of a child and a lithe, slender body. Her hair was short and fitted her head like a golden cap. Her eyes were large and frightened and she resembled nothing so much as a nervous, sensitive fawn. She had three brothers and they loved her more than anything on earth. There was Gunther who was noble and fine, and Guttorm, a little stupid and slow-witted, and Hagen who was moody and supposed to be very clever. Each brother loved her in his own way. Gunther was inclined to lecture her and tell her that she was a child no longer. It was time that she grew up to womanhood and to suffering. Words like this made Gudrun tremble and fear life and wish that she need never grow up at all. Guttorm gave her presents—dogs

with soft, pleading eyes not unlike her own, and he played games with her and did what she told him no matter how foolish her request. Gudrun, perhaps, took advantage of him. She ordered him impossible tasks, but she always kissed him lovingly when he obeyed and considered she had paid him for his trouble.

Hagen she adored. She never asked him anything. She spent her time shadowing his footsteps until he ordered her off like a common thrall instead of his little princess sister. She begged him to tell her strange stories and sometimes he did. When she came from hearing them her small white face was very sad and her great eyes looked as if she had seen some dreadful thing. And yet Hagen loved her with all his stern harshness. There was the day when stupid Guttorm teased her too long and she wept. Hagen might have killed his brother if Gudrun had not torn them apart. Gudrun shivered when she remembered things like this about Hagen, but in her heart she adored him all the more for them.

The mother of these four interesting children was a fierce-hearted woman. From her Hagen received his black moods. Perhaps it was because of her that Gudrun's eyes always wore a look of fright. Gudrun had never had a thought that her mother did not know. And so it was that when she dreamed a strange dream one night, she rushed at dawn to Grimhild's room. Grimhild was called the Wise-wife and the reading of dreams was an easy thing for her to do.

"Mother—a strange dream came to me and I cannot forget it," Gudrun looked very young in her long white sleeping robe. Her smooth golden hair curved to meet the shape of her face. In the pale light of morning, her eyes were darker and more beautiful in their look of fright than ever before.

Grimhild the Wise-wife was a little bored with Gudrun. Her love was for her sons. So she spoke sleepily to her daughter.

"Tell me your dream and do not take it so seriously. Dreams often forecast naught but the weather."

Gudrun cupped her serious young face in her trembling hands, "No—no, mother, no weather is this. I dreamed that I had a hawk on my wrist, feathered with plumage of gold."

Grimhild made the obvious answer to quiet her: "Many have heard of your beauty and the fame of your family's wisdom. Some king's son is destined for you."

"But I dreamed that naught was so dear to me as this hawk. All my wealth I would cast aside rather than him—even my brothers I would forget."

"That is easy, my dear. The man you shall have will be of the godliest and you will love him well."

"But I am afraid to love as much as that," Gudrun cried, "I do not want to love anyone more than Hagen, my brother."

"Be still," said Grimhild harshly. "You speak as a foolish child." For the Wise-wife loved Hagen more than any of the rest of her children. She was jealous

of Gudrun's love for this mysterious and gloomy brother.

"But mother—it grieves me that I do not know who this man is, and whether your telling of my dream is a true telling."

Grimhild sent her away impatiently.

But the next night Gudrun dreamed again and this time she would not tell her mother the dream. Her distress and her fright were so great that she went around half-ill, very pale and looking so fragile that her brothers were afraid.

"What is it you wish, my little Gudrun?" the king asked her.

"Father, I have dreamed strange dreams and I long to hear the wise words of the Valkyrie maiden, Brynhild, who is said to be able to read the most subtle things. A wandering minstrel came to the court yesterday with news of her awakening from the sleep of punishment. He said that she had gone to Hlymdale to the home of her foster-father."

"But, child, Brynhild is a long way from here—a sea-journey and a land-journey that will take you many weary days."

"Dear father, I cannot be happy until I see her." And Gudrun was so convincing in her appeal that Giuki ordered a train of damsels and a company of warriors to prepare a ship at once for the journey. Grimhild sat back in scornful amusement. But after all, this fantasy took Gudrun's mind away from Hagen, and the old woman was satisfied.

So Gudrun arrayed herself in a golden robe and a short cloak of gold, and little golden sandals with open fretwork were on her feet. Her train of maidens wore garments brightly colored so that they surrounded Gudrun like gay gems. None of them wore a golden cloak—that was for the little princess. They drove in golden wagons through the garden of enchanted roses that surrounded the castle to the river where a ship awaited them. On the deck were piled cushions like bright flowers. Here Gudrun lay with her sleek golden head uncovered in the soft air. She was surrounded by her maidens-in-waiting, and they talked of fanciful things and giggled a great deal behind their little hands, as is the way of young girls gossiping together.

"Did you see Hagen try to come with us, but the the queen wouldn't hear of it?" whispered one maiden.

"I thought Gudrun would be too frightened to leave at the last," said another softly.

The sailors were skilled and the boat was worthy. In a few days they were well up the Rhine and finally they came to the stretch of sea that must be crossed before they reached Brynhild. It was stormy and rough and little Gudrun hid her head in the arms of her maidens and wept. Why had she come so far from home? And what would Brynhild know of a dream of days before?

Hlymdale was on the sea and almost as soon as the sailors sighted the high towers, the ship was also seen by those who watched from the walls of the castle.

There was great excitement until Brynhild said: "That shall be Gudrun, Guiki's daughter. I dreamed of her coming last night. Let us go to meet her. No fairer woman may ever come to our house, nor to any other house."

So those at Hlymdale went down to the sea for the coming of Gudrun, and in the great hall the henchmen and the cupbearers made ready for a feast of such luxury and color it looked like a painted banquet. Silver cloths were spread and the floor was carpeted with scarlet for the little golden feet of Gudrun to walk upon.

On the beach Brynhild stood apart from the throng. A smile played about her lips. There was an expression of resignation in her eyes. In her heart she was saying: "So it was as I thought it would be, and Siegfried is not mine—nor ever shall be mine." But she did not grieve for her heart was proud and she knew that no happiness lay in the world for her. The boat came skimming over the waves toward her and her keen eyes went straightway to a small shining head and a vivid flower-like face. For a moment Brynhild did the womanly thing. She compared that lithe, small body to her own glorious height—she felt the wind caressing her long heavy hair and wondered what it would be like to have short wildly blowing locks. If there was jealousy in her mind she laughed it away and when Gudrun was carried down from the boat to the beach she found a gracious woman waiting to welcome her.

"It is good to see you here on these far shores from your home," Brynhild said.

But Gudrun was silent and shy. Her eyes sought Brynhild's appealingly. She did not answer the welcome that those of the north gave her.

Brynhild whispered to her so that none could hear: "Child—do not be abashed, in doing so you will end the mirth and good-will of these people who have prepared a feast for you."

"But I have come to see you alone on a matter of the greatest importance to me," cried Gudrun impetuously.

"Prithee, do not disappoint these people," Brynhild said, "later we will go to a lonely bower and you shall tell me the things that lie nearest to your heart. But now, let the meeting of queen-folk be a glorious thing. Come with me to the high hall where a golden seat awaits you. There let us talk together for the entertainment of our listeners. We will gossip of mighty kings and their great deeds; you will tell of your fine brothers and I will tell of the gods. Good talk it shall be and your maidens-in-waiting will take back to the court of Giuki tales of your charm and how those of the northlands found you enchanting."

"Good talk," Gudrun agreed, blushing shyly, "let us do even so—though you must lead the conversation where you wish it to go. I am not a clever maid. I can but answer what you ask."

Brynhild laughed and put her hand on the white shoulder of Gudrun. "You are a modest child—too

modest I fear. You should be vain,—knowing what victories lie before you."

"What do you mean?" Gudrun said in bewilderment.

"Nothing—I was only pretending that I could prophesy," Brynhild smiled.

"You are a very curious woman," Gudrun sighed, "much too clever for me."

Then they went to the hall and sat together on the dais covered with scarlet cloth. Maidens bore them wine and there were many listeners as these two noble women, so different from each other, matched their tales of great men.

"There were the sons of Haki and Hagbard," said Brynhild, "they brought to pass many a deed of fame in their warfare."

Gudrun pursed her lips and nodded her head thoughtfully, "Great men certainly, and of far-reaching fame. Yet Sigar took their one sister and burned the other. He razed their hall to the ground and I have heard my brothers tell that they are slow to revenge this wicked deed. Why did you not name my brothers who are held to be the first men of this time?" said Gudrun proudly.

"They are men of good hope surely," Brynhild agreed, "But they have scarcely proven themselves worthy yet of such a name as first men of their time. Gunther will always be noble and kind but he lacks a certain ruthless power that is needed to make a hero. Hagen has that ruthless power—but has he the last

essence of nobility and fineness that never can do a wrong? I wonder," Brynhild mused.

"And darling stupid Guttorm is like his stupid sister," Gudrun sighed, "he can never be clever enough to be a chieftain. You are right, Brynhild. But tell me, is there such a man as we both are thinking of in our hearts, alive today?"

"Yes—one," said Brynhild.

Gudrun waited for her to tell who he was and where his dwelling might be, but it was a long time before Brynhild spoke. And when she told the story of this hero her eyes glowed with tenderness and her voice was rich and deep with emotion.

"His name is Siegfried, the son of Siegmund, the king. A youngling he is still—in the full days of untried manhood—and yet he has accomplished deeds worthy of a man. He grew up in the forest, untrained and wild, and yet his speech is fair—so fair perhaps that when he speaks men wish that he would never be done and it seems that all that he has told is true. He has never known fear, and he is aided in his brave deeds by a beautiful sword that Odin gave to his line and by an invulnerable skin that he won by his own slaying of the dragon Fafnir."

"How ugly he must be—all scaled and horned," said Gudrun, shivering.

"Nay—his skin is the same as other men's—soft and smooth but the color of bronze-gold and his hair is a red-gold of brilliant hue. His face is high-boned and his eyes are keen and not the eyes of a boy. He is

magnificently tall so that his sword Gram which is seven spans long smites the ears of standing corn in the full grown fields."

"From love you have gained these tidings of him," said Gudrun softly, "never have I heard it said that Brynhild spoke well of any man."

Brynhild turned away and her voice was strange as she answered: "Nay—all the northlands know of him by now. He has gone back to the great court of Hjalprek from the glittering heath where the dragon was slain. Sagas are being sung of him—and the poets sit at his feet drinking in his fair words and giving them back to him in song. He goes within the next moon to slay the sons of the Goths."

"Why does he love battles and bloodshed?" sighed the gentle Gudrun.

Brynhild turned away and her voice was strange and warlike. The light in her eyes was unreal and Gudrun shrank back afraid.

"He loves the clamor and the clash of swords—shields falling—spears clashing—shafts breaking. The sweetness of victory and the pain of death—the cries of the warriors and the trumpets' blare. Banners unfurled—horses tramping—the scarlet of wounds—the whiteness of the slain."

"Then he fights for no honorable cause?" Gudrun cried.

Brynhild sank back on the dais and closed her eyes with the tiredness of a warrior who had fought such a battle as that she had just described. She said wearily:

"Yes, he does, my child. I have described myself and not the warrior Siegfried. He cannot fight simply for the joy of fighting. That is a joy only felt by a Valkyrie. He goes to the Goths to revenge the death of his father, and of his noble grandfather who first made known the line of Volsung heroes."

For a while the two lovely women were silent and brooding. At last Gudrun said:

"Do you know why I have come?"

"Why have you come?" Brynhild answered.

"To tell you dreams of mine which have brought me great grief and fright," said Gudrun. She clasped her slim hands nervously over the strong hands of Brynhild, and her eyes begged for help and her clinging body was beseeching.

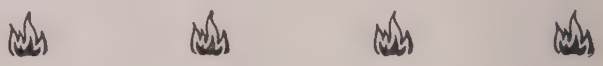
"Come away with me where no one will disturb us," Brynhild smiled reassuringly, "and you may tell me all that troubles you."

When they left the hall, voices that had been subdued broke into a loud buzzing.

"Do they like each other?" wondered the maidens-in-waiting—"Does our lovely mistress impress the great Brynhild?"

"Have you ever heard Brynhild speak so of any man as now she speaks of the Horned Siegfried?" said Heimer, foster-father of the famous Valkyrie.

And those who had listened to the words of the proud Valkyrie shook their heads in wonder.



In the tower-room Brynhild sat with the young Gudrun. The thin tall flames of the tapers burned, for evening was falling. It was a dim pleasant atmosphere that invited confidences. Gudrun sat with feet crossed under her and her chin cupped in her hand. Brynhild stood at the window, looking out at the first pale stars that pierced the purple dusk. She longed to speak to Gudrun but she waited to hear her speak first, fearing otherwise she might frighten the young girl into a confused shyness again. At last Gudrun began—hesitantly—and then swiftly so that her words tumbled over each other and often came in the wrong order.

"Brynhild—a dream—the strangest of dreams came to me. The second night I dreamed again and this second dream was even stranger than the first. I remember them as clearly as if they actually happened. Sometimes I think that they must have happened," Gudrun pushed her golden hair from her forehead with nervous hands. Her eyes were dark with anxiety.

"Tell me your dream, little princess—and do not let matters as vague as this sadden you. Is it not enough that life is filled with actual things to command your worry?"

"Yes—yes," Gudrun cried, "but I cannot help it. I cannot stop thinking strange thoughts. Brynhild—promise me, no matter how it may hurt me, you will interpret my dream rightly."

"Yes, Gudrun, I will tell you the truth. It is easier

to face things when one expects their coming," Brynhild answered.

"This I dreamed," said Gudrun, "that many of us went in a company from my father's court to the forest. In the black woods we found a great hart—it far excelled all other deer that any of us had ever seen and the hair of him was golden. We all wanted to take him but I alone got him and I loved him more than any other thing. He seemed greater to me than my brothers—even Hagen who is—perhaps— the favorite of my brothers. And listen, Brynhild, someone shot and killed the hart—even at my very knees, so that I saw his gentle eyes as he died. I could scarcely bear the grief of it."

Brynhild turned again to the window. It was night outside now and the deep blackness shut out every vestige of the world. There were only the faint far-off echoes of laughter from the great hall. Brynhild swung around and faced Gudrun. Her face was as white as the child's at her feet. Her voice bit like a cruel harsh thong, "Gudrun, I will read your dream and even as I say these things shall come to pass. Siegfried shall come to you—even that same Siegfried whom I have chosen for my well-beloved. Grimhild shall give him a powerful mead that is mingled with hurtful things and it will cast us all into mighty strife. Siegfried you shall have—but even as I have lost him—you shall quickly lose him also."

"Oh, what a sad dream it was—I knew it," Gudrun hid her face in her hands.

"But think of the happiness when Siegfried rides to your door," said Brynhild.

"But I shall take him from you—and he will be taken in turn from me. How sad it makes me to know that life is like this," sobbed Gudrun.

"Perhaps the dream is wrongly read," soothed Brynhild, "perhaps this fair Siegfried has captured my imagination so that I read him into all things. Forget the dream—forget my telling of it," she begged.

But Gudrun was not to be comforted. She summoned her maidens-in-waiting and sent word to the sailors that the ship must start on its return journey at dawn. She longed to leave the place where she had learned her destiny. Once back in the safety of her brothers' care and love, she felt that she would not be afraid.

Chapter XVI

SIEGFRIED AVENGES HIS FATHER

AT THE court of Hjalprek there were again days of high feasting and tournament. Siegfried had returned. Drifting toward the hall came every famous scald in the northland and all were made welcome. There was a new saga for them to learn and another song of Siegfried to be sung. For long they had travelled the lands telling of the half-wild child raised under the evil spells of the dwarf Mimir. They had regarded the boy as a figure of enchantment and not the flesh and blood substance from which true heroes are made. But now they must change their song. Siegfried was a man, tried and proven. His last deed was one so startling, men spoke of it with more than awe. There was not a chieftain in the north who would not pause in the midst of his drinking and merrymaking to hear of Siegfried's slaying of the dragon Fafnir. The gold coins tinkled in reward for the added tale of the Nibelung hoard and the cursed ring of Andvari. When the fire-ride to Brynhild was sung, the silence throughout the hall was like the stillness of the vast empty snow-fields, in the long winter season.

And a new Siegfried had come home. The quiet sensitive boy was gone. Instead, a keen-eyed man with

a wealth of humor in his talk and a great capacity for feasting and carousing joined the king's men. Hjordis found that her son was a man, full-grown and not in need of her. Hjalprek rejoiced that the name of Horned Siegfried graced his court. From the oldest earl down to the impetuous young thrall, Alf—Siegfried was made welcome. In the short space of a fortnight he knew the names of many and a few were engraved on his heart. How long could they keep him? What would they not give to have him among them for all time. But the day came when Siegfried went to Hjalprek and the king knew what the youth's words would be before they were spoken.

"O King—here have I stayed with you, and I owe great thanks and reward for the love and honor and gifts accorded me. Now the time comes for my departure—you will understand that I must go."

"You go to Gothland to avenge the death of your father, Siegmund," said Hjalprek.

"Yes—I go to make my first war upon many. I should like to go alone, proving that the Volsungs are not all dead—but they would easily vanquish me. I ask of you a favor—the strength of your ships and your men to accompany me."

"All that I have is yours," said King Hjalprek. "The time has come when my court lies unmolested. A charitable rule does much to maintain peace. There will be little danger for us who remain on the estates if you leave us a reasonable guard. Your war-gear must be of the stateliest and your ships beautiful as

well as sturdy so that your entrance into Gothland will be glorious to look upon."

"While you call the armies together and see to their equipment, I should like to ride down to the sea and inspect the fleets at the ship yards. Is this the wish of your majesty?"

"My wish is your wish—let me say it once again," smiled the king.

"Very well," laughed Siegfried happily, "I shall give a splendid imitation of the king himself as I choose a ship beautiful enough to dazzle the mightiest."

"Is there anyone here you wish to accompany you, Siegfried?"

Siegfried shook his head in denial—but then turned back, adding thoughtfully, "Yes—the young thrall Alf—there is a special feeling for him in my heart. You remember we rode here together that first time."

"The boy will be immensely pleased," said the king, "he has never forgotten his siege of the robber's den."

When Alf was summoned to report to Siegfried, he turned hand-springs among the house-carles and bondsmen. They surveyed the broad-faced freckled thrall with envy. What had he done to deserve so great a distinction?

"Pooh—you have no stomach for war, I vow," said the highest cup-bearer in disdain. "Why does he want a short-faced mottled red-head like you about?"

"I am to go with him while he chooses a ship for himself," said Alf proudly, "he has great faith in my good taste."

"Good taste—the suckling speaks of good taste," screamed the other thralls in glee.

"Taste this then, young fellow, and see how good it is?" they cried raucously, forcing the unpleasant contents of a bowl of sour curds down his throat.

Alf sputtered and choked and vowed his revenge when he came back from the wars with Siegfried.

"But Siegfried has a horned skin to protect him and yours is as milky white as that of all milksops," taunted one of the cooks.

"We must bathe him in something—what shall it be?" they cried.

"Hot broth!"

"Melted tallow so that he can light the way for Siegfried."

"The milk of a cow."

"In ale—good ale!"

"In ale—good ale," they took up the cry, and before Alf could stop them they had stripped off his white clothes and pushed him under—head and all—in a giant tun of ale.

"And he shall be known throughout the northlands as Aley-Alf!" they chuckled.

"And his shield shall have upon it a horn of mead."

"And his sword shall be engraven with ale-runes."

In the end Alf managed to escape, clutching his white suit under his bare arm. Reeking of strong ale, he ran straightway into Siegfried.

The thrall tried to duck his head and dash past unseen, but Siegfried, sensing some horse-play, blocked

the boy's path and said smilingly, "What's your hurry, young caitiff?"

"I have—I have—I have to take a sw-w-wim," said Alf, turning as scarlet as his flaming hair.

Siegfried let him go his way, and nothing more was said of the ale bath when the two set forth to the ship yards a little while later. At first Alf was shy—partly because the bondsmen had taken all the conceit from him—but Siegfried soon put him at ease.

"Remember the robber's den," said Siegfried, "you played the part of the fool well, Alf. Watch out or they will be making you do it often."

Alf laughed merrily, "Will I ever forget putting my head right into a robber's den—it might as well have been a hornet's nest," he chuckled.

"The gods were with us. I knew it when I saw the sack of meal," said Siegfried.

"None but you would have been clever enough to turn the meal into a weapon greater than any sword," Alf said shyly.

"Will you ever forget how frightened you were when I started to walk toward the king in the hall?" laughed Siegfried.

"By my troth—I was certain that you would trip on a lady's skirt!" cried the thrall. "I turned to the old earl and told him so, but he seemed to have read your disguise better than I did."

"But it was no disguise," smiled Siegfried, "I must have been a strange figure in my animal skins."

"A magnificent figure, sir," Alf said in awe.

"Come—forget all this magnificence," laughed Siegfried, "unless we look for it in a ship."

The journey passed quickly and they came to the pounding sea in the late afternoon. The ship sheds were inspected at once, and in them they found a dragon-shaped ship that seemed made for Siegfried. It was ornamented above the water line with gold and fine dragon heads were on either end of it. The tightly furled sail was woven with the fineness of a woman's gown. The weather-vanes were of gold and the color on the ship was the gayest red and purple. There were many rooms, each as luxurious as a king's bower on land. An emblem already flew from the masthead. It was Alf who cried out upon discovering it:

"Look, Siegfried, the ship is yours. The emblem there has your image upon it and the slain dragon at your feet."

And Siegfried saw that indeed the pennant had been spun in the design of his deed at Glittering Heath and Horned Siegfried were the letters woven thereon. He knew that the building of this ship was the task that Hjalprek had ordered done in his absence. He loved the ship at once, even as he loved his horse Greyfell—they were his own possessions. He sent Alf to choose the rest of the fleet while he examined his own vessel from mast to keel. He found that it was one hundred forty feet long. They said that it would take one hundred huskarls to man her.

Siegfried mounted Greyfell and rode swiftly back

to the court. He left Alf to see that the ships were provisioned and made ready to leave at an early day. There must be a long council talk with King Hjalprek to learn the names of the best warriors and to choose the defenders of Siegfried's own dragon ship.

Greyfell thundered over the roads and carried his master to the court by nightfall. Siegfried hurried to the high-hall and the seat of the king.

"There are no words to speak my gratitude," Siegfried cried, "it is a ship that every man might dream of for a life-time and never call his own. What Norseman living does not thrill at the thought of a sea-fight —every bondi owns a craft of some sort—but only a chosen few may have such a ship as mine."

"Hjordis and her women worked upon the sails and banners," said the king graciously, "and I myself rode to the shipyards to see that the smiths and the other craftsmen put the best of their trade into the ship's body. It had to be a dragon—for well we know that you will come home with the deed of your dragon-slaying known throughout the north."

"May we talk of the choosing of the crew," said Siegfried.

"Yes—I wished to bring the matter to your attention at once," Hjalprek turned and dismissed the men who sat near him, and soon the great hall was empty save for the king and Siegfried.

"The most valiant men must be stationed at the prow and the stern, is it not so?" said Siegfried imperatively.

"You are right. That is where the most decisive battling takes place. There you must put the chapmen who know the ship best. I think that you will find my standard-bearer the bravest of any on the seas—he is called Finn the Red. Surround him with such men as Thrand Strongarm, Olaf the Dodger, Leif of the Horn. On the forecastle, in the bows, men of greater years should go—I would suggest Bjorn High Nose, and his three brothers, men of mighty stock. They will lead any others of weaker fibre. In the stern Thorstein the Tall, Erik Bronzebeard, Einar Fang-tooth, and the rest of the warriors of great height and strength. Station the weaker crew at midship."

"Is there need of a chart or do your seamen know the route to Gothland?" said Siegfried.

"We have several aged and shrewd mariners who will take no part in the fighting but will go with you simply because they are the worthiest of sailors and know the sea as you know the great forest looming near us."

"Then we may start as soon as the weapons are assembled and the men marched to the fleet," said Siegfried.

"Or to say it another way—you may start dawn after this dawn," was the king's answer.

And even this time seemed far off. Siegfried feasted that night with the king and his mother. They tried to make him tell of his adventures but his mind was too full of the adventure that lay before him to speak of events already passed.

He met their questions with polite answers. Then they saw him turn to his own thoughts again and they both were filled with a nameless fear that the adventures he would meet the rest of his life would bring him less happiness and good fortune than those he had thus far encountered.

In a certain pale dawn the fleet commanded by Siegfried moved silently from the harbor like phantasms of the sea mist. There were ten ships, ranging from a small vessel that could scud its way through the narrows and reefs judging the depths for the larger ships, to the beautiful golden dragon that belonged to Siegfried himself. The passage was a long one but Siegfried gloried in it because he had never made a sea voyage before. For three days the wind was in their favor and the fleet had smooth sailing. But on the fourth day a storm broke and all men were put to baling as the great waves dashed over the decks. Siegfried watched the surging main and for the first time felt the power of an elemental force. He refused to acknowledge its sovereignty, and when the sailors cried:

"May we take in the sails?"

He answered, "You may not."

The fury of the storm did not abate. It seemed at times as if the whole sea rushed over them and they waited, deluged by the spray, to see if they were still afloat. At last they sailed past the rocks of a ness and they saw standing on the promontory an old man in a

In a certain pale dawn the fleet commanded by Siegfried moved silently from the harbor like phantasms of the sea mist

deep blue cape and a broad brimmed hat. He hailed the dragon ship and cried to be taken aboard.

Siegfried knew that the Wanderer had once more crossed his path, so he turned the ship landward and took in the sails. They passed the headland near enough for the Wanderer to leap aboard.

"We are pointed toward the Baltic," said Siegfried, "you are not unwilling to leave the northlands?"

"Concern yourself not with my wanderings," the old man said quietly.

Siegfried led him away from the curious gaze of the sea-farers.

"You have always come when I needed you," Siegfried said, "so I must believe that I need your wisdom now. Tell me this, Allfather, since you know well the fate of all of us—the good and the ill of mankind—what shall be the outcome of this battle and what is the farsighted command that the leader of the fleet shall give?"

The old man said: "The sea-battle will be yours and your own wit will find a way to win it. But after that will come a land battle which will not prove so easy a victory. Follow the rules of the world of token and superstition. Look for a dark-winged raven—seek two men standing on a long road—listen for the wolf howling under ash boughs. Do not let any man fight with his face turned against the moon, and have each warrior fair-combed and well washed. Feast well on meat before you fight and do not drink ale until the battle is done and the homeward voyage begun."

Before they reached that sea-zone where the shores they sought loomed mistily, the Wanderer had disappeared. The crew were afraid, for they thought that a man overboard boded no good. But Siegfried told them that this one that had come on to their ship from the rocky ness was of the gods and good cheer reigned again. The storm subsided and all believed that the Wanderer had ordered its departure.

By the time that they had neared the harbors of the Goth king, an arrogant fleet of ships had set forth from Gothland to meet them. It was not an easy task to judge how many ships were against them and how each ship was manned. For a moment panic surged through Hjalprek's men. They saw that the Goth ships were coming toward them, confident and warlike, and they mistrusted the power of Siegfried. What could a young woodsman and swordsman know of warfare on the main?

Suddenly they heard a strange command from Siegfried. Their faces blanched and terror filled their breasts. What madness did their leader propose?

"Bring me the small askar and unman it," Siegfried said.

The small bobbing boat that was used as a pilot through treacherous shoals was ordered to the side of the great dragon. Shrugging their shoulders, the dumbfounded crew left the boat. They saw Siegfried carrying a curious hooded cap in his hand, jump down into the askar.

"Hold the fleet as nearly still as is possible. Let the

dragon ship form the center of the block and keep the ships together. Watch me and when I turn the askar back toward you come quickly forward in a line, ready to attack."

They thought that he was mad. The greatest warriors of King Hjalprek hid their disbelief from the common crew, but in their hearts doubt persisted. Thrand Strongarm paced the deck with set lips. He did not answer the mumble of protest that went up from the attending ships. Erik Bronzebeard shook his head almost imperceptably as his eyes met the bewildered gaze of Finn the Red. Erik said: "Yes—it is harder for you who have never yet let the standard fall on a warship."

"I have never won a battle by standing still and letting the enemy come upon *me,*" Finn said hotly.

Just then a hoarse cry went up from the men in the other boats. The crew of the dragon searched the waters for its cause. The cry was echoed from their own throats. A strange unreal sight met their eyes. Bobbing along on the deep billowed swell was the small askar. Where Siegfried had stood but a moment before, there was no one. Indeed—nowhere on the open decks was there visible a single man, and yet the askar sailed as if it were guided by some strong hand. The superstitious knelt down on the decks, convinced that the gods had intervened. The sterner warriors simply watched—incredulous and startled. The phantom ship sailed straight into the midst of the enemy fleet. The boats were thrown into the wildest

confusion. The Goths were helpless. What good did the throwing of spears do when they pierced the wood of the small boat instead of the hearts of the invading host? The enemy slowed their ships, afraid of the trick. What if the gods were veiling the Norse crew until they were blockaded in a perfect position for an attack?

The askar sailed placidly in their midst. Little they knew that Siegfried stood with a tarn-cap on his head —as invisible as the children of the mist. Unseen by the Goths, he was able to count their numbers, their weapons, and their ships. At last the askar turned about with a creaking of sails. It was caught in a calm for a moment and then lifted by the rush of the swell again. As soon as it pointed about, the invading host of Norse ships lunged forward like unleashed hounds. The askar met them half-way. The crew saw the figure of Siegfried appear suddenly on the deck of the little ship. His command reached the first man and was repeated on and on to the others.

"Attack the wings first. The smaller ships are there. Jump from them to the larger ones until you come to the center ship which is the main bulwark. There are seven vessels on each side of the great vessel in the middle," was Siegfried's message.

"What are their weapons?" someone cried.

"Spears and arrows. I have seen no grappling hooks. Use ours at once and without pity."

Then the horns were blown by the northmen and at the same moment the war-horns of the Goths

sounded. Both sides shouted a war-cry and the battle began. It raged fiercely at first—in a tangled confusion of flying arrows and spears, and a terrible crashing sounded as onslought of both fleets met in a shivering collision. The Goths with no plan of attack were helpless when they saw the northmen's fleet separate and attack their wings as if by a premeditated design. All that the Goths could do was to fight bravely—with javelins and spears, hand-to-hand duels with short swords when the chance offered and a continuous attack of arrows whenever they came within shooting distance of the northmen. But more than this the northmen did. They held fast to the smaller ships of the Goths with grappling hooks—clearing the vessels systematically of their crew, taking possession and passing on to the next ship as if each vessel of the fleet was but a stepping stone to the one beyond. Men were tossed into the sea like the shattered spars and broken masts that a storm carries away from a ship. They were hurled like scraps of food to the gulls floating on the waves. The Goths fought fiercely and blindly. They attacked their own men in their confused efforts to gain control of the situation. But steadily the northmen demolished—at first the little ships and then on to the greater ones until finally only the great war vessels in the center of the array were left to finish the fight. Some of the northmen were slain as well, and several of the ships had retreated and separated from the line of attack. Siegfried became very angry when he saw this and boarded a smaller sculd, ordering the oarsmen

to steer back to the vessels that lagged uncertainly behind the others.

"You lubberly cowards," he cried, "call you this a seaworthy attack? The points of your spears are silver —better they shall fasten in your own limbs than go unstained entirely with blood."

His harsh words stirred them to anger and they rushed their ships forward in a new attack. This reinforcement was like an added thrust to the pressure already bearing down upon the Goths. There was a last spurt of flying javelins—a last sprinkling of falling arrows, and a truce was called by the Goth fleet. Two hairless old men came forth ingratiatingly to meet Siegfried. They had removed their war-helms, displaying their horrid baldness as if it were some stark immodesty.

"The battle is yours," they said.

"So we were beginning to think," mocked Siegfried.

"You are northmen—but may we ask the name of you who are the leader?" said the Goths.

"You may ask, but I may not care to answer," scoffed Siegfried.

At that moment one of them saw the dragon emblem that Siegfried wore. The Goth started backward in horror. "You are not that far-famed hero, slayer of Fafnir the dragon, the last of the Volsung line, and one who is called Horned Siegfried?"

"I believe I may lay claim to all of that," Siegfried said.

"You are not content with the sea battle then?" the

Goth said tremblingly—"come—if we give you all of our fleet, will you turn about and set sail for the north again?"

"There is not much left of your fleet to give," Siegfried said.

"Why have you come determined to let loose fire and sword and lay waste our lands?" whined the other old man.

"Why did the Goths come and lay waste the fair lands of the Volsungs, capture my grandfather through treachery and slay my father in a battle drenched with brutality? I come to avenge and not to seek a war of my own making. This day the last of the Volsungs will beacon forth in Gothland like the flame that devoured my people. The Goths will die with their throats haltered with a cord, their carcasses thrown to the ravens and their columns of warriors ground to a powder."

The next day the first land-raid was made, and a great company of Goths who had watched the demolishing of their own fleet met the invading hosts of northmen courageously. But they soon fled before the face of the enemy. Word went to the king of the Goths and he sent a war message throughout all his realm, summoning to him all that would give him aid. He came against Siegfried with a great army and a furious land battle was waged. There was the raising of spears and of axes among all Goths. They came in a rushing defense array to beat back the enemy, and shields were cleft and byrnies torn in their first mad

attack. But gradually the northmen regained the ground they had lost. They moved forward steadily —slowly at first and then with a sureness that sent the Goths fleeing in panic. Helmets were rent asunder and skulls split as men fell in their attempt to escape the pursuers. And foremost in the fray strode Siegfried. He went before the banners of his people and his sword Gram smote down both men and horses. Nothing would hold before him and he sent men squealing like frightened rabbits from his path. The time came when the king himself met Siegfried face to face. When the sword Gram pierced the coat-of-mail and found the heart of the ruthless Goth leader, the end of the fighting was marked.

The northmen, filled with power, longed to go forth and lay waste further, but Siegfried shook his head sadly. He was the greatest fighter of the age—but at the same time he was the greatest man of peace. He turned wearily back toward the ship. He had obeyed Odin and kept his men in splendid condition. They had entered the battle each morning, washed and fed. They had obeyed the curious omens of battle-lore. And victory was theirs. Siegfried had fulfilled the oath he had made in the temple of Hjalprek's court. Siegmund was avenged and the Goths had lived to regret their treachery against the Volsungs.

"Before we sail for home, I wish to go directly north to the old hall of the Volsungs where the famous tree Branstock grows," Siegfried directed Finn the Red.

And so the great fleet of Hjalprek's ships and the

Goth ships conquered by Siegfried, set sail for the land of the Volsungs. For many days the ships voyaged, and the sea was calm for the most part since it was the summer season of the year and the high storms of autumn were not yet upon the waters. The first landing place in the north was at a certain seacoast town where a vast trading fair was in progress. Trading ships from the south had come from expeditions into lands as far east as Samarcand. As Siegfried's fleet approached the harbor, he saw the gayly painted merchant ships and a curiosity came over him to see the fair. He took with him certain of the warriors and the headman, Finn. They were welcomed by many people who had watched the incoming fleet with awe. For the best part of a day Siegfried walked in the booths, bartering for wares with a gay abandon that his comrades found difficult to understand. They did not know that he was striving his best to forget the scenes of destruction he had left behind him. He purchased fine furs and costly clothes. At last Finn said curiously:

"Do you wish to return with cargo on the ships?"

"No," Siegfried answered, "I have a desire to see the hall of the Volsungs once more decked out as it was in the glorious olden days when my father feasted there."

The men of Hjalprek fell in with Siegfried's wish readily. Not one of them but had heard of the line of the Volsungs. The tree of Branstock was almost a legend in their minds. They sailed further north

along the shore and came at last to a jagged rocky coastline. The ships seemed to move cautiously as a sensitive horse feels his way along an uncertain path. They reached the harbor of the forgotten land of the Volsungs. It looked as if no ship had anchored there for many moons. Ice floes still lined the shore, strangely illogical ghosts of winter on a summer day. There was a mournful plashing of water on the rocks. The whole scene was one of desolation and gloom.

Siegfried landed his men and ordered them to carry the bales of fine tapestries and silks to the hall. He was the first to go through the porch pillars—opening the lacy ironwork door with strong hands. He paused for a moment on the threshold. It was just as he had dreamed it would be. Little mattered that the shields on the walls were tarnished and the draperies torn and colorless. It was a great hall—the greatest any of them had ever seen. It was built on such a massive scale that it seemed as if giant men must have lived there. The high roofing was like a dark sky high above them. Down the length of the hall were rows of pillars made of the mightiest trees and in the very center stood the tree called Branstock, like a colossal column of rock. Siegfried went closer and saw in the gnarled bole of the tree a deep crevice where the sword Gram had struck and been pulled forth by Siegmund.

"Festoon the hall as you have festooned the high-hall of Hjalprek," he ordered. The men worked feverishly, carried away by the thought of those men of the past who had dwelt where they now stood.

They relived in their minds the saga of the Volsungs. They decked the throne carved of rugged wood with cloth of gold and they dreamed of the king who had once sat there. When the hall was as glorious as any living king's, Siegfried ordered his men away. He did not want drinking and feasting here. It was a hall where feasting and jesting were done.

Siegfried surveyed the empty room. He saw a shining green lamp with curious golden figures on it and knots of gold hanging from it. He saw the loom of some woman of the court, empty of threads. In spite of the rich decorations, it seemed an abandoned house. Siegfried was filled with a desire to make it live again—to people it with brave warriors and lovely women. In his heart was a strange stirring. He looked at the dais beside the rugged throne, and he remembered Brynhild and wished that she were with him that they might rule here together.

After awhile Siegfried went out from the hall. He ordered the crew back to the ships and the fleet turned homeward. As the crew drew near their own familiar harbor, their spirits rose. Victory was sweet! They would be hailed as heroes. Another song would be sung of Horned Siegfried! He had sailed a ship, invisible to all, and spied out the enemy so that victory for the northmen was certain. Ah yes—there was no one like Siegfried. They loved him in every mood, the ruthless warrior, the merry companion, the regal son of the Volsungs. There was not one among them who was sorry he had sailed with Siegfried to Gothland.

Chapter XVII

SIEGFRIED DEFIES THE GODS

THESE were days filled with fear for Hjordis, the mother of Siegfried. She faced the future courageously but her heart was filled with foreboding. Well she knew that Siegfried would not remain content with his laurels already won. He had conquered with ship and sword alike and been proclaimed worthy of his name, but soon he would be tormented by the desire to conquer anew. Hjordis went to the king and said to him:

"Hjalprek—tell me who are the most dangerous warriors of the north?"

"Ourselves, my dear," smiled the king proudly.

Hjordis looked thoughtful. Then there was no danger for Siegfried in their own land.

"Tell me, Hjalprek—what war-like tribes dwell near us to the southward?"

"The most warlike of the tribes near the Rhinelands are the Saxons. They are a great sea-power. They plunder and burn and slay their enemy without mercy. Nearer the river there is a fiercer tribe still. They are called Burgundians and their men are more than mere plunderers. Their court is renowned for its culture and riches and the beautiful little princess Gudrun

dwells in the castle, saying that she will marry no man because of her love for her three brothers. A tribe I should like to meet—in war or in peace," mused the king.

Hjordis looked at Hjalprek with troubled eyes. The king was startled at the appeal he read on the beautiful face.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing—nothing—only should Siegfried ask you this same question I have asked will you lie to him concerning these warriors of the south? Do not let him leave the northlands for his conquests."

"I will do what I can," said the king, "but Siegfried is not to be bridled like a young colt and he is not to be bidden this and that by another. None is strong enough to master him."

Hjordis went slowly back to her looms, to spin and weave a cloth of silk whose shimmering lights were dimmed by her tears. And so it was that a few days later terror struck her heart when she overheard her son's laughing voice outside her window. He was talking with young Leif, son of the earl of Bittersweet.

"Leif—she is the loveliest among women and she knows how to be merry instead of glooming the way that most women do."

"But you cannot believe that she will ever marry you?" Leif cried in wonder—"A Valkyrie, Siegfried—subdued by mortal man—I should not think it possible."

"Nay—that part of it I do not fear, nor did she. She

had some idea that the gods have decreed other destinies for us, but that does not frighten me away."

"What other destinies?" inquired Leif.

"Oh—there is a princess called Gudrun—I do not even remember where she dwells. Brynhild says that I am fated to marry her. Of course I don't believe it."

"Gudrun—I wonder if it can be that famous Gudrun?" mused Leif.

"What do you mean?" asked Siegfried.

"Why—there is a lovely Gudrun who lives in the court of the Burgundians. She is surrounded by a garden of roses and guarded by eleven warriors and giants. She does not wish to marry because she loves her three brothers so dearly. No man dares to attempt to meet her because the Burgundian king is so strong and the princess' guard so heavy, the hero would probably never live to see her face."

"It might be sport to pretend I was her suitor," laughed Siegfried.

"Nay—her court lies a long way to the southward and the men are weary after battling the Goths. Wait awhile until the army is eager for a fight—and a real one. To see Gudrun promises more than a mere quarrel, Siegfried."

"Bah—you exaggerate the terrors of these Burgundians. It is true the army needs a rest. I will take with me ten men so that we will be evenly matched against the eleven guards in the garden of roses and set forth at once for the southern court."

As Siegfried cried these words joyously, the door

of the hall swung open and Hjordis came out. She was very pale and her slender hands reached out to her son.

"Siegfried—believe me," she said pleadingly, "if you go to the court of the Burgundians you will meet with harm. You will lose Brynhild whom you love and wed this Gudrun whom the gods have chosen to bewitch you."

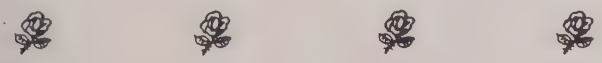
Siegfried tossed his golden head and laughed loudly. He walked to meet his mother and pulled her unwilling hands down to his sides.

"You think that anyone can marry your son against his will?" he teased.

"Siegfried you do not know what you are saying," the eyes of Hjordis were frightened.

"Let the gods do their best," cried Siegfried boisterously, "let them try to mate me with Gudrun when it is Brynhild that I love!"

Leif was as pale as the queen. Siegfried had defied the gods. It was a blasphemy that could not go unpunished.



"Tell me, good king, what I may expect when I have sailed down the Rhine as far as the court of King Giuki, the Burgundian?" Siegfried asked, as he made ready for his new adventure.

"Before the city there is a garden of roses, seven miles in length. It is surrounded by a silken thread alone—but whoever breaks through the thread and tramples

the roses is immediately attacked by one of the eleven guards. These guards are instantly summoned by some magic means to the garden of enchanted flowers, and the intruder has little chance for his life."

"Tell me of the eleven guards?" Siegfried said.

"First there is the good King Giuki himself—"

"Why do you call him a good king?"

"Because he is deserving of the title," said Hjalprek, "he maintains a noble court, a prosperous kingdom. He loves his daughter dearly and guards her at her own request. She it is who would rather wander through rose paths with her three brothers than meet the heroes who come to woo her. And so the king and ten men are always aware of the silken barrier. Should any man break it he will be met by the king, the three brothers, Gunther, Hagen and Guttorm, by Folker, Pusolt, Schruthan, Ortwin, Aspeian, Walter of Wachsenstein, and Standerfuss, sturdy and arrogant giants and warriors."

"Well, I am not afraid of them—giants or warriors all," said Siegfried, "I am not going to woo their treasure Gudrun, but to see their court, what manner of men they are—and what manner of woman the gods would give me for a mate."

"It grieves me to hear you scoff, Siegfried," said Hjalprek gravely. "If the tale of your light talk of Gudrun were ever heard upon the Rhine, you could never ride into the land alive. Gunther and Hagen and Guttorm are known to me. They are men of power and of skill—and more important than that,

they love their sister so dearly they would fight with super-strength any man who regarded her as you are doing."

Siegfried flushed at these words of reproof. "I am sorry I seemed to make mock of a maiden I have never seen," he said. "My words bore no ill will. The truth is I am keen for an adventure of some sort, and I have seized upon the Burgundians as warriors worthy of my bravest efforts. I will leave this week for the Rhine kingdom."

"With a host of my men, I beg of you," Hjalprek said, all his sternness gone.

"Nay—with enough men to meet man to man the eleven guards of the garden of roses."

"Be that as you desire," sighed the king. "Your mother wishes me to tell you that if you insist upon this venture she will clothe you and your warriors in raiment that is worthy of the northlands."

"You may tell the queen to have the raiment made ready," smiled Siegfried, "and bid her weep not for there is naught to fear."

Day and night, Hjordis and her maidens worked upon the raiment. The mantles were made of white silk brought from Arabia and of green silk from the land of Zazamank, embroidered with many gems. The covers of the mantles were made of the skins of strange fishes, covered with silk from Morocco and Lybia. The choicest ermine was used for borders and the heroes were richly adorned with gems set in Arabian gold. The horses with their golden reins and

saddles inlaid with rubies and sapphires were taken on a strong vessel and in Siegfried's golden dragon ship sailed the eleven brave men.

The hour came for farewells. For the first time Hjalprek and Hjordis seemed to doubt the strength of Siegfried. They wept silently and the dread of the king and the queen swept through all the ranks of maidens and men who had come forth to wave good-by. The warriors were sad and the young girls hid their heads in their veils. But the last word of Siegfried rang out joyously and full of courage: "For my sake," he said, "you must not weep nor have fear for me and for my life. You must rejoice in my adventures. There must not be death in the bed by odious old age for Siegfried! Let the Norns summon me upon a battle-field."

The sea was still and the journey to the mouth of the river uneventful. When they reached the river, Siegfried and his eleven men landed on the banks, instructing the sailors to stay anchored there the full passage of the moon and then if they had heard naught from Rhineland to go back to the court of Hjalprek and bring a great army of northmen to the court of the Burgundians. Siegfried and the ten men set forth along the shore. The sun shone upon their armor of ruddy gold and their fair-fashioned trappings; shining breastplates, shimmering mail and silken martingales. The sharp javelins and swords hung down to the bright spurs of the warriors. Upon the seventh morning, the men paused in their riding. A

faint sweet perfume filled the air. The fragrance was heavy and inescapable like the perfumes of Arabia and those spicy clinging attars of crushed flowers that come from the Orient. It was a moment before Siegfried realized they must be approaching the garden of roses.

"There may be some magic in their garden," he mused. Hesitating he wondered if it were best to meet enchantment with some plan of subtlety. But he was impatient and more of a warrior than a thinker. He had grown scornful of the ways of magic in the old days at Mimir's grotto. Lifting his sword high, he spurred his men on to whatever fighting was to be done.

They came to the garden. The roses were scarlet and white—row upon row of them. The breeze rippled through the hedges and bowed down the proud blossoms. The silk thread that barred the warriors from the flowers was nearly invisible. From time to time the sunlight touched it and it stood out like the single pale shimmering strand of a cobweb. Siegfried and his men leaped forward, trampling the roses and breaking the thread. They had gone little more than half a mile through the seven mile garden when they saw men come riding toward them. On foot beside the horsemen were giants, reaching far above the mounted figures, so tall that the rose bushes grew like short plants at their feet.

To Siegfried's amazement when the host of Burgundians approached him, they bowed low. And Siegfried reared in Greyfell just in time to keep from

crushing the first man of the Burgundians who had dismounted from his horse and was kneeling among the roses.

"We are wondering," said the stateliest of the strangers whom Siegfried guessed to be the king, "whence comes this noble Siegfried and what he seeks in our kingdom of the Rhine?"

"I have come from the northlands," answered Siegfried, "and I will not conceal from you the reason of my coming. Tales were told me in my father's land that here with you lived the boldest of warriors. I came that I might know the truth of this. Likewise I have heard boasting of your valor, that no bolder king has ever been seen and no sterner man has ever guarded a pretty garden of roses. This the folk related to me and I was curious to meet you. Tell me before I speak more of my mind how you came to know my name?"

King Giuki answered him: "My son who is named Hagen guessed your name. Though he had never seen the Horned Siegfried he had heard tell of him from minstrels. He knew you by your horse Greyfell, the sword you carry that is twice the span of other swords, and by your daring. Who else but Siegfried, son of Siegmund, would dare to enter the garden of roses with only ten men at his side. The last host came five hundred strong to trample the blooms, but Pusolt revenged the injury and the brothers of Gudrun crushed the invaders as easily as if they were frail blossoms. Tell me, do you come in peace or come in war? We have not attacked you though we have sur-

rounded every other company that has broken the silken thread. But you are no ordinary man. Your name is noble and we are proud to welcome you to the land of the Burgundians."

In spite of these friendly words, Siegfried maintained his air of haughtiness. He was first of all the warrior. He said carelessly: "I also have been born to wear a crown. I would bring it to pass that men of the Rhinelands shall say of me: Rightly he rules both folk and land. Of this shall my head and honor be a pledge. I have come to make your lands and castles subject to my hand."

The king and his men were startled at these calm words. The knights were quickly angry and put their hands to their swords. Gunther cried: "Shall we lose by the force of any man that which my father has ruled so long with honor? This ruthless Siegfried should have been treated with the ruthlessness we have accorded lesser men than he."

"I will not give up my plan," Siegfried stated coldly, "unless your strength is greater than mine. It is a fair offer. Should you conquer instead of me, my ancestral lands of the north will be subject to your sway. Your lands and mine shall henceforth be ruled alike —which of us triumphs over the other shall be ruler of both estates and peoples."

Gunther spoke quietly: "Farcomer—listen to our words. We have no wish to claim other lands than this one of ours. It becomes us ill to end a hero's life. The world is barren of such men as you. Ap-

proach and meet us pleasantly. Come to the castle and join in our tourneys and be one of us."

The others did not keep their tempers as well as the gentle Gunther. Grimly Ortwin of Metz cried, "It irks me too much to hear these words of peace from you, Gunther. The mighty Siegfried has defied us for no just cause. His haughty mien is unbecoming—sorely discourteous in the garden of roses."

"Tell me what irks most mightily," teased Siegfried, "that I shall lay my hands on the dominion of the Burgundians or that I surprised you by casting aside your words of peace?"

The Burgundians fumed and whispered in angry conference. Before they had come to any decision, they heard the low laughter of the hero of the north. They turned to see him, standing aloft in his stirrups, putting his sword back in his belt, tossing his golden head as he laughed loudly.

"How seriously you take me," he said, "I could not withhold these rough threats when I saw what manner of men you were. I had expected a battle fraught with grave danger and I found courtiers bowing at my feet. It was too good to miss. I have played with you, my friends. I do not fight with those who are not of a mood to battle. Gladly will I go with you to the court."

The Burgundians looked sulky and confused. Only King Giuki laughed—for he was old enough and wise enough to see when a joke was aimed at him and cleverly played as well.

"Welcome again then, Horned Siegfried,—and take what you will from my kingdom. I think that I may trust you."

"What I take, then, will be single-handed," smiled Siegfried. As an act of his good faith he turned to his ten strong warriors. "Return to the ships at the mouth of the Rhine," he ordered. "Set sail for the court of Hjalprek, reporting to the king and to Queen Hjordis, that Siegfried has chosen to visit awhile with the king of the Burgundians."

"You dare to stay unattended?" cried Lief, the closest friend to Siegfried of all the northmen. "How do you know that this gentle welcome of the Rhine people is not some trickery?"

"The day will come, Lief, when you can read the hearts of men even as Siegfried can," smiled the young hero.

Lief looked longingly at his friend—waiting the desired word to linger. But Siegfried turned away. There was nothing for the northmen to do but to gallop off, leaving their amazing comrade at the mercy of a whole kingdom of strong men.

"Only one thing must be said to you," the blunt words of Hagen brought a look of haughtiness to Siegfried's eyes, "if you have come to woo the little princess, Gudrun, you may well follow your squires away. It is not that we will prevent you by force—we need not stoop to this. Gudrun herself prefers the love of her three brothers to the love of a husband. She does not desire any man. Since she dreamed a strange dream

she will not hear your name in her presence. She may refuse to see you and no amount of bravado can win the heart of an unwilling girl."

"I have not come to see Gudrun," smiled Siegfried, "I am betrothed to the glorious Brynhild. A man who has heard the tumultuous words of a Valkyrie hearkens not to the baby chatter of an untutored princess."

Hagen's face darkened, but he shrugged his shoulders as if the matter were done. In his heart he was surprised to find that relief had surged over him at Siegfried's words. Had the northman avowed his intentions of winning Gudrun, Hagen had little doubt that Gudrun's other two brothers would have found the thought as unbearable as he did himself. Siegfried would have had to fight for his life.

The king led the way back through the garden to the castle. As Siegfried rode into the courtyard, he found himself searching the crowd that welcomed them for one who might be Gudrun. There were lovely maidens—but none among them, he felt sure, was the little princess. He saw the tall strong woman with heavy yellow braids and clear far-seeing grey eyes who was crowned queen. He was told that this was the wife of Giuki and the mother of the three princes, one Grimhild. As he met her direct gaze the feeling came over him that she was an opponent worthy of his strength.

"So you have come," she said slowly, "as my daughter dreamed you would."

For a moment he was chilled—perhaps the gods

were stronger after all. They had predicted his coming, then, to Gudrun as well as to Brynhild.

"I have come," he answered with dry humour, "to make your daughter dream."

"The question is if you will even see her, do not forget," interrupted Hagen crossly.

"But I have already seen her," laughed Siegfried.

They looked at him in amazement—and following his gaze they saw the startled eyes of Gudrun peering down from a turret window. At the sound of Siegfried's laughter, the golden head disappeared quickly from sight.

Chapter XVIII

SIEGFRIED AND GUNTHER SWEAR BROTHERHOOD

THE Burgundians rejoiced in the presence of the hero Siegfried. He became one of them, riding in their hunts, sitting at their feasts. King Giuki came to look upon the young Northman as a son and talked with him concerning the most intimate matters of his kingdom. The brothers of Gudrun were at first wary of him, but when they found that he loved the Valkyrie Brynhild and regarded their sister as nothing more than a playmate, they too received him whole-heartedly. What the Queen thought, no one knew, but it was suspected that she had some plan for him that would be as profitable to herself as to Siegfried.

Siegfried was eternally gay with all of them. His favorite among the brothers was the gentle idealist Gunther. The two were curiously suited. Where Gunther met life gravely, Siegfried loved to be merry. When Gunther brooded, Siegfried carried him away from thoughts of himself by racing with him, dueling with him, or pummeling him joyously. What Gunther did for Siegfried was to listen patiently while the young northman poured out his dreams and plans. He gave the gift of sympathy and a close friendship that Siegfried had never had with a youth of his own

age. Gradually the most sacred things in Siegfried's heart were bared to Gunther. The serious-minded Burgundian was stirred by stories of the northman's youth. He found himself amazed at the high moments in the life of his golden-haired friend. There was no envy in Gunther's being, but he learned to love all that Siegfried loved as if it were his own. Soon he had little of his old life left. His dreams were, like Siegfried's, of the glorious Brynhild and his desire was for adventures that equalled Siegfried's own.

The little princess Gudrun was at first shy of the commanding newcomer at her father's court, but at last she too accepted him and treated him as if he were another brother to love. Gudrun shadowed Gunther and Siegfried and heard a great deal of their confidences. So it was she learned that Siegfried loved Brynhild more than anything on earth. At first she was relieved. Her dream need not disturb her. Siegfried was not destined to be hers after all. As the days passed, Gudrun's young heart ached for what might have been. But she did not admit to herself that she would have liked Siegfried for her own.

King Giuki loved above all merrymaking at his court, the jousting of the knights in his tournament grounds outside the city. As soon as Siegfried had proved himself a friendly visitor, the king sent forth messages to all the Rhinelands that the greatest tournament of the year would be held. The prizes were to be coffers of dazzling treasure and the event would have for its audience all noblemen of the court and the

fairest women of Burgundy. And now every day brought warriors to take part. Some were followed by bold and haughty trains arrayed brilliantly for the gala tourney. Often a single youthful champion came riding with only a shield and a sword to mark him off from common men. Thirty or more princes traveled from surrounding kingdoms to Giuki's court.

The seats and boxes in the pavilion were assigned to nobles of the court and to the high-born guests. In honor of Siegfried the Viking flag flew beside the pennons of the Rhinelands, its bold war-like raven seemed to challenge battle. The boxes that lined the lists were bright gold and hung with emblems and heraldic devices. They were ornamented within as richly as castle rooms, hung with tapestries and heavy curtains. Marshals and heralds were stationed about the grounds while the varlets and thralls stood ready to hand forth new weapons to replace those shattered in the fray.

The warriors and knights had gathered. All was ready for the entrance of the ladies. Music blared from the trumpets. Rich chamberlains came marching. Then those who waited saw the proud Grimhild entering the lists with her child, Gudrun. A train of fair women followed them, dressed in glowing colors. Gudrun was in snowy white. Her golden head shone uncovered in the sun, while all the other maidens wore quaint caps. Gudrun carried three roses in her hands, picked from the enchanted garden. These she gave to her brothers, tokens that her heart was with them.

Siegfried stood apart from the other nobles of the court. With his long red-gold hair curling about his shoulders, he was like a beautiful figure limned on parchment by some ancient master of illumined manuscripts. When Gudrun saw him she wished that she had given him a rose also, and she ran to the king and whispered in his ear:

"Sire, let the prize for the bravest man in the tournament be a garland of roses from my garden."

The king was pleased. This was a gift worth more than the golden caskets filled with jewels, for the little princess had given it. The heralds announced the prize and Gudrun watched Siegfried with anxious eyes. She half expected him to call to her that he would win her offering, but he did not once turn in her direction.

Trumpets sounded to announce the first charge of horsemen. Siegfried and the other knights of higher merit, stood beside their horses to watch the lesser men fight. Jet-black horses with golden reins rode into the lists. Falchions flashed. There was the scream of a wounded hero—the clatter of falling shields. Fair women waved brilliant pennons. The entrant accorded the victory was a blond young man from a kingdom to the south. He was called Karl and this was his first tourney. Gallantly he enlisted in the next round.

So round by round passed, and at last those knights left in the ring were men worthy of the notice of the sons of Giuki and the stranger Siegfried. Now began the famous charge of the day—men who had not sat a

saddle for years rebelled at their old age and wished passionately for a horse and a sword worthy of this entry. The young striplings who sat in the boxes with their mothers and sisters longed for the day when they would be old enough to fight in a tournament. Every maiden felt her heart leap high at the sight of the dozen men left for the finish.

The trumpets blared with a new note. Flags unfurled. Ribbons waved. The first clash of arms was like a thunder-clap. For a moment the fighting was a furious tangle. It was impossible to see which knights had the upper hand. The first man to fall was the blond Karl who had fought so gallantly in his first tournament. He had met more than his match in this final encounter. In the brief space of a moment he found his shield split asunder, his sword wrenched from his hand and his horse wounded. It took two squires to pursuade him to leave the lists. The fire of the fight was in his blood and he would have liked to find another mount. The judges ruled him out—partly in kindness. It was easily seen that the knights had unhorsed him rather than killing him outright. They might not be so patient if he persisted in matching his youthful daredeviltry with their tried strength and skill.

A second and a third charger staggered off the grounds. Soon the sons of Giuki and the stranger, Siegfried, were the only warriors left. Hagen and Guttorm and Gunther signaled a truce, for the brothers had never fought a fight to the finish among them-

selves. They had no wish to kill each other and the tourney at this point had come to the place where killing alone would settle a victory. Everyone waited for Siegfried to withdraw. But he did not do so. He turned to the judge and said:

"I came to the land of Burgundy to seek fame. Two choices confront me: the one to fight bravely to victory, the other to leave the lists with these brothers. Should I do so shame would follow me. Call forth any champion to fight a duel with me. We will not fight to the death but to the other's downfall. We will not fight upon our horses for I have no desire to wound a charger. Let us follow the rules of my country—put down a skin or a cloak and fasten it to the ground. Mark three squares, each one foot wide, outside the boundary of the cloak. Put four hazel poles outside the squares and he who goes beyond them is said to have retreated and is thus vanquished. Let each man have three shields. When the third is shattered the battle shall be done."

The heralds called for a champion. None answered. At last Gunther came forward. His face was very white and he looked angry. He said very sternly:

"You who are called Siegfried! You show greater love for battle than for peace. The Burgundians have learned that peace is as great as the clash of swords. The sons of Giuki called a truce—not because they fear a fight to the finish but because they do not care to hurt needlessly. You have challenged the Burgundians with your Viking carelessness. You who fear nothing

—even death—play merrily at battle. Peace is unknown to you. I accept your challenge because I have listened to your stories of glory and been stirred by them."

Siegfried hesitated a moment. He did not want to fight Gunther. He had come to love this serious Burgundian with a rare warmth. It was too late to withdraw. The squires had thrown the mantle on the ground and fastened it to the earth with wooden pegs. Shields were brought forward and Gunther stepped into the square. Siegfried who had made the challenge was forced to stand until the first thrust of the man he had challenged was made. Gunther's sword struck the golden haulberk that Siegfried had brought from the Nibelung hoard. The thrust scarcely dented the metal. Siegfried's lunge brought the answering ring of a shield cleft in two. Gunther fenced in vain with Horned Siegfried. The sword Gram spoiled the young Burgundian's three shields in as many times as it took to thrust each one. The crowds roared with excitement at this mighty feat. With the cleaving of the third shield, Gunther fell.

A death-like silence filled the lists. From the royal box, Gudrun's voice broke the stillness. "Gunther—Gunther." The people saw Siegfried drop his sword and his shield and kneel at Gunther's side. The tall fair Norseman listened for the heart-beat of his opponent. Those who stood near enough heard him whisper: "Gunther—it is I—Siegfried—you must not die. You are the only friend I have. Come—it was

only play—I saw that the point of my sword did not touch him—he cannot be hurt badly."

Perhaps it was Gudrun's kiss that stirred Gunther back to consciousness. In a moment he stood up weakly and put his hand willingly into Siegfried's. Gudrun fled like a frightened deer back to the shelter of the royal box. She trembled with happiness. Gunther lived and Siegfried had proved he could be gentle. The maiden had heard his soft words when Gunther lay as if dead.

Suddenly—as men made ready for departure—heralds began to cry forth a proclamation. They told the people to wait. A strange ceremony was to be enacted before them. The word spread like a flame. Siegfried the Northman wished to perform an ancient rite in the presence of the Burgundians. It was the custom in the northlands for valiant men who had fought against each other and admired the bravery of one another, to swear a sacred and binding oath of brotherhood. It was one of the most touching and beautiful things in a man's life. The Burgundians were filled with pride that Siegfried had chosen one of their tribe for this tribute. Gunther had long loved Siegfried. Pale and weary as he was from the duel, he insisted that the ceremony of their oath be taken at once. So the turf was cut from the ground and raised in a loop so high that a man could go under it. Siegfried looked at Gunther and said with deep feeling: "One and the same fate may come over us"—and they bound themselves to each other for life, to be unselfish and true, to

share the same danger and to avenge each other's death. They walked beneath the garland of turf and there drew their own blood, mixing it together with the earth. They fell on their knees calling upon the gods to witness their oath and clasped each other's hands fervently.

Never had the people of the Rhinelands taken part in so brave an event as the tournament given by King Giuki in honor of the stranger Siegfried. They were to remember the events of the day for many years, and not least of the activities—the curious bond of brotherhood that two men so far removed from one another in tradition and birth gave into one another's keeping. A day was to come when all the world would remember again that Gunther and Siegfried had been foster brothers.

Hagen, the moody one, was envious of this gift that had come to Gunther. None knew this save the gentle-hearted Gudrun. She felt her brother's jealousy and did all she could to comfort him. Grimhild in her turn sulked over the new comradeship between the little princess and her favorite son. Only the good king and his stupid Guttorm rejoiced in the relationship of Siegfried and Gunther. The nobles of the court whispered together over this new turn of affairs. It seemed inevitable that some harm would come from the fierce-hearted jealousy of Grimhild and Hagen.

But days passed peacefully. And now the songs of Siegfried were heard in the Rhinelands as well as in the north:

Suddenly to Alberich, Siegfried the hero ran,
And by his hoary beard he caught the ancient man;
Down to the earth he threw him: for mercy did he pray,
When by the champion's might, on the ground he lay.

They sang of his ride through Brynhild's fire:

The flame flared at its maddest,
Earth's fields fell a-quaking
As the red flame aloft
Licked the lowest of heaven.

Many maidens of Burgundy watched the hero ride past on his noble grey charger, and mused wistfully upon his haughty ways. He seemed filled with the bleak cold spirit of the Northlands. The men of Burgundy were eager and warm-hearted. This far-comer was stern and withholding. Those of the Rhinelands who had never been to the Northland could well imagine the land that rang with the howl of wolves, the sweep of hail, the grinding of ice. They were awed by Siegfried. He had withstood all the miseries of the cheerless ice country as well as battling the dreariest waste of waters in the north.

None guessed that the sensitive and gentle Gudrun sorrowed that the brave hero did not honor her with a glance. The princess grieved more deeply than any of

the other maidens in the land. Siegfried rode blindly on his way, secure in the first deep happiness of his troubled life. He loved two people—Brynhild and his foster brother Gunther. Around these two he built his life. Brynhild had ordered him to test his love for her by staying away until the spring of the next year. He was obeying her desire and was happy because the year was nearly over and his love had not waned. Gunther needed him to stay near, for troubled times had come to the Burgundians that only the king and his eldest son were aware of. Siegfried waited to hear how he could help the clan that had been good to him. One day the good king called him and told him the fears of Gunther and himself:

"Siegfried, listen to me. Strange tales have come to our lands brought by messengers sent from afar. These are stories of warriors who bear us unreasonable hate. These warriors I shall name to you: there is Liudeger of Saxon land, a great and lordly prince, and from Denmark, Liudegast, the king. It is said they have gathered many lordly strangers as well as their own men to come to battle with us. The journey will be made within twelve weeks. Do you think I should parley with these foes and try to come to some truce without a battle?"

"You have good friends in the Rhinelands who will help guard your castle," said Siegfried simply, "and you have Horned Siegfried who comes from the north where no truce of peace has ever been made before the clashing of swords."

"Send for Hagen and Guttorm," the king directed Gunther, "I will bide my time until I hear their words."

Guttorm who had never thought upon serious things in all his life, was proud to be summoned by the king. But his opinion was the reckless one of a boy, made without forehtought: "Of course we will fight the foe, sire. The only ones among us who will die in the battle will be the fey, those doomed by fates to perish at this time. So let them die. For their sake let us not forget our honor. Welcome the foe!"

Hagen spoke more thoughtfully. "It looks serious to me, father. Liudegast and Liudeger are arrogant and strong foes. It will be difficult to summon our men in so short a time."

Siegfried interrupted the gloomy Hagen. He spoke with curt impatience and commanding voice: "It will not be difficult to summon men. I can promise you that. Gunther and I will ride through the kingdoms to the south and round together enough soldiers to win the war. Should your foes have thirty thousand men, I will need but a thousand to conquer them."

King Giuki said at last: "You shall be the commander, Siegfried, and we will serve you. It will be a glorious day if we can conquer the Saxons."

"Let the envoys of the enemy ride home to their masters' lands. Give them gifts to show your generous disposition and to prove how slight you regard their threat. Tell them if they stay at home you are their friend, but if they seek you in your own land, hardships

beyond anything they have endured will await them here," Siegfried ordered.

This was done by Giuki. Merrily the envoys from the Saxons and Danes set forth with caskets filled to the brim. They returned to their masters with messages of war. Siegfried was the only one in Burgundy who waited impatiently for the end of the twelve weeks. The gloomy Hagen predicted ruin. Giuki tried to push doubts from his mind, but when he looked at the young face of Siegfried he feared he had put his trust too readily in a boy's dream of glorious deeds. Gunther who loved Siegfried beyond anything in his life, feared for what he had done. He could not bear the thought of Siegfried's humiliation if the Burgundians were conquered.

Now every day the smithies rang with the making of new weapons. Gudrun and the maidens of the court worked upon mantles and pennants. Embroidered banners were mounted on great poles. Warriors poured in from the countryside to receive weapons and to learn the plans of the fighting. Each morning Gunther and Siegfried mounted their chargers and rode forth to enlist new soldiers. The words of Siegfried rang like a clarion call through hamlet and wayside. Men saw the grey charger pass. They caught a glimpse of a magnificent figure with hair of bright gold and features of strength and beauty. There were few who did not mount and follow him as they heard his stirring words:

"To arms—to the aid of your king! The Saxons are

coming! Ride to the court and join the ranks of Giuki."

By evening, the roads were dusty from galloping horsemen. The light of the warrior's fires burned in the streets of the city. When Siegfried came riding homeward, he found that many men called to him in passing. They were men he had inspired to join the ranks of the king. Greyfell carried his master swiftly through the lines of eager followers. Siegfried lifted his hand in salute.

A nervous unrest filled the hearts of Giuki's men. Guards of the king were watching on the river and posted outside the city. The time came when all were armed and there was nothing to do but await the arrival of the enemy. This was the most difficult task of all. The undercurrent of unrest bred a certain fear. The soldiers went about looking pale and weak. King Giuki suffered doubts of their prowess. Had Siegfried urged him on to his downfall?

Gudrun vowed in her gentle heart that if Siegfried had led her father into some treachery, she would somehow avenge this wrong. She treated the young hero coldly and threw herself more ardently than ever into Hagen's company. Grimhild watched jealously. If the young Siegfried conquered the enemy, Grimhild had a plan for him. He would serve her purpose well. She who longed for only one thing on earth—the love of Hagen for herself, would marry the hero to the impressionable Gudrun. Well she knew that her little daughter would not be hard to convince if Siegfried

saved the King. Then she would have Hagen for herself.

Siegfried was the only one in Burgundy who did not brood and worry over the coming struggle. He would have been astonished if he could have seen the intricate workings of the minds of those who surrounded him. The young hero devoted every waking hour to encouraging and directing the soldiers. Then he went calmly to his room to rest. If anyone had told him that little Gudrun planned his death should her father meet defeat, he would have laughed incredulously. And if he had learned that Grimhild planned to steal him from Brynhild and marry him to her daughter, he world have dared her to try as he had once defied the gods. But he knew none of these things. He thought only of the dangers that must be overcome in the battlefield, and so it was that more dangerous matters than a war began to surround him.

And in a state of high tension the city awaited the first blare of its war-trumpets from Saxony.

Chapter XIX

THE FIGHT WITH THE SAXONS

WORD reached King Giuki at last that the Saxons and the Danes were approaching in different battalions. King Liudegast and his men of Denmark were the advance guard and behind them the unbelievably strong forces of the Saxons were lying in wait. King Giuki summoned the men-at-arms of his own kin and the liegemen of his brothers. These he made ready for a journey, for he desired to send forth a troop of his own rather than to wait for the oncoming host. Folker, the daring, was given the flag to bear and Hagen was master of the troop. With him rode Sindolt and Hunolt, Dankwart and Ortwin. Siegfried, the champion, was given no orders. He could come and go as he pleased and his command was above all men's. Then Giuki disappeared into an inner room and came forth attired in battle array. Gudrun wept softly when she beheld her father and her favorite brother making ready for the dangerous onslaught. Siegfried, seeing her tears, turned to the king and said:

"Sir King, stay here in the court and let your warriors follow me. Remain with the ladies and keep their spirits high. Hagen and I may be trusted to guard well both your honor and your estate. I promise you that

I will bring it to pass that those who thought to seek you here upon the Rhine would better far have stayed at home. We shall ride forth to meet them and their proud defiance shall be turned to fear."

King Giuki looked longingly at the prancing horses in the courtyard. He touched his sword with eager hands. But his eyes turned toward the silken head of the fair Gudrun. He saw her frail hands covering her eyes that he might not see her tears.

"You are right, Siegfried, there is need of me here," he said.

The last good-by was between Gunther and Siegfried.

"I may not come with you, then, brother?" Gunther's voice trembled.

"Nay—should anything happen to us, there must be a strong and ruthless hand to avenge us and to save the court of the Burgundians," Siegfried answered.

"Yes, you are right," Gunther said.

The troop was off. From the Rhine they rode through Hesse towards Saxon land. As they neared the border, they slowed their pace for they knew at any point they might come upon the advance guard of Liudegast's men. They approached the bottom of a ridge. Siegfried called a halt.

"There is no need of galloping blindly into the encampment of the enemy," he said. "I have a feeling that our men lie beyond this ridge. Hagen, divide your troop, and put different leaders at the head of each company. I myself will ride over the ridge and take

the post of outlook. When I have discovered how many warriors are in this first guard, and where the great Saxon armies are placed, I will return and we can make our plans."

"The valiant Dankwart and Ortwin shall guard the rear," said Hagen, "Gernot and myself the front lines."

"I am off, then," cried Siegfried.

As Greyfell climbed the ridge, Siegfried wondered for a moment at what he had done. His own safety was of little importance, but the safety of the Burgundians was a sacred trust. He thought of the fierce Saxon soldiers invading the beautiful castle. He pictured young Gudrun in an agony of fear. It was enough to spur him on and he urged Greyfell into a faster pace. From the hilltop he looked out across the plain and saw a mighty host encamped there. The enemy outnumbered his men and their strongest forces were still in the rear. Siegfried and his horse stayed on the hilltop for many moments while he conjectured and planned a way out of the trap.

Suddenly the northman beheld a mounted horseman spying upon him. In the full glare of the sun, it was difficult to make out who the man might be, his age, his weapon, his probable strength. But Siegfried saw that the stranger was bold and unafraid. He had already spurred his horse away from the troops and was coming across the plain toward Siegfried.

Siegfried did not wait to recognize his foe. He plunged down the hill toward the advancing warrior. Using their spurs at the same moment, the two horse-

men rushed forward and clashed with a rending sound of spear meeting shield. The mighty thrust carried the horses past each other as if they were borne on by the wind. Seizing their steeds by the mane the knights wheeled about and once more encountered each other with their weapons. Siegfried saw that his foe was King Liudegast himself.

Siegfried smote first before his enemy had barely gained his balance. The cry of Gram rang over the whole field and bright red sparks flew from the steel as if it were a firebrand. Liudegast returned the blow as savagely. The shield of Siegfried seemed to shiver under the fierce attack. Now began a reeling and pitching as if the two horsemen were galleons under full sail on a billowy sea. There was a brutish spilling of blood and from time to time a hoarse cry of pain from Liudegast. Before the King's guard of thirty men could reach him, Siegfried had pierced three great wounds through the golden breast-plate bearing the Danish coat of arms. The blood from these wounds so weakened the King that he fell half-fainting from his horse and Siegfried dismounted to help him.

"Let me live," Liudegast begged, "you may have my lands if you will give me my freedom."

"Later I may unchain the bonds," Siegfried said, "but now you must stay in captivity. You may be needed as a hostage when the Saxon armies attack us."

"And a fine hostage you will make yourself," Siegfried heard a voice cry. He looked up and saw thirty horses ridden by the guardsmen of the king.

The fight that followed was one of the most terrible Liudegast had ever witnessed. Siegfried, twice fortified—by his stern sword and by his hardy invulnerable skin, was safe from the blows that attacked him. But in self-defense he slaughtered the guardsmen right and left. They fell, calling to their gods for help against this demon of the sword. They died with wonder on their lips and bewilderment in their eyes! What had happened could not be. Single-handed, Siegfried had swept aside his foe. Twenty-nine men lay dead—and the last of the defeated company fled back to the men of Denmark to tell the tale of the king's capture and the wiping out of the guardsmen.

Siegfried mounted Greyfell and put the fainting king Liudegast in front of him on the horse. Then he rode swiftly to the troops he had left behind in charge of Hagen. When Giuki's men saw Siegfried returning with a captive, they asked eagerly whom it might be. The word swept through the ranks. "It is King Liudegast of the Danes. It is the king himself!" And the Burgundians were spurred on. They lifted their banners high and sent their leaders to Siegfried to beg for orders to rush over the ridge.

"Now that the men of Denmark have no leader, they should be easily taken," Siegfried said. "They are encamped a mile away on yonder plain. Come, heroes of the Rhine, and I will lead you to Liudegast's band who lie in wait behind the Danes."

The stalwart minstrel, Sir Folker, grasped the battle-flag and rode before the band of brave men who fought

for King Giuki. The warriors rode in comradely fashion. And everyone—from twelve winters up to sixty made light of the danger ahead. They called cheerfully to one another. Marshals led the troops and Siegfried, with a guard of men-at-arms, formed the front rank.

As they rode over the ridge, the war horns were blown, echoing for miles in every direction. The men of Denmark proved themselves heroic in spite of their lost leader. Their fighting was very fierce and terrible blows were dealt as the champions rushed furiously into Siegfried's ranks. But the men of Burgundy beat them down as summer wheat is flattened by the first storm. Frightful wounds were carved. Blood flowed over the saddles. When Siegfried had opened a wide path through the Danish hosts, he rode through it with a part of his men while Hagen and Gernot took captive the flanks of the bewildered and beaten enemy.

When Siegfried had taken the Danish hosts, he called his leaders to him and they searched the horizons for the camp of Liudeger, the Saxon. Outlooks were sent riding in all directions to look for some sign of the waiting hosts. Late afternoon brought news that the dark shapes of the Saxon tents had been sighted and the sun's rays had caught the glitter of many golden shields and helmets. At once Siegfried rode among his men, warning them that on the morrow they would meet a new host.

Late that night Siegfried spoke with Hagen.

"My friend," he said, "let us not fear the outcome

of tomorrow's battle, but let us take every precaution for the sake of the king and your beloved Gudrun."

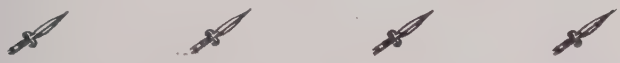
"What do you mean?" Hagen asked.

"Let us send word back for Gunther to come with the last of the Burgundians."

"You have no faith then in my leadership?" cried Hagen in quick anger.

"Hagen—speak not before you know what is in my mind," Siegfried said sadly. "I have more faith in you and your brilliant ruthless command than in anything else. But it remains that Liudeger's troops far outnumber us. If they should demolish you and me, let another troop be ready on the other side of the ridge. Let Gunther stop the host from going on. Then if Gunther fails—the enemy is still far enough away so that little Gudrun can escape before they reach her garden of roses."

Hagen saw that Siegfried spoke wisely. He flushed and agreed that this summoning of Gunther was a good plan. They dispatched a messenger and sat down to wait until the dawn.



Scarcely had the sun risen above the horizon when the attack began. The onslaught of Siegfried's hosts swept over the plain. At the sound of their horns and war cries, the Saxons rushed furiously from their camp, advancing with backs bent under their bows and dragging missiles as well as their long swords. Then with tremendous crashing and thudding, the stones

and missiles let fly and both armies seemed to move together in a single body.

In the midst of the fray—seeming to be in all parts of the field at once—could be heard the voice of Siegfried—taunting and urging his men to greater deeds of glory. He sang to them, praised them, and rushed into the face of almost certain death to rescue them. He lifted fallen banners and urged the drummers to beat louder while he gave orders to the leaders. Wherever the Burgundians looked, they saw the tawny-haired, lean-bodied stranger who had come from the north to lead them to victory.

The first day of the battle ended, a breathless day of destruction. The two armies staggered back to their camps wondering what another dawn would bring forth. Early in the morning men awoke to the sound of the war horns and they charged forward again, fighting no less hard than the first day. Night came with the Burgundians weaker and the Saxon hosts moving nearer the ridge. In the same way the battle went on the third day, and Siegfried strode grimly up and down that third night, knowing full well that his men were beaten unless some miracle came with the next attack.

The fourth day began with the horns urging the men to a last effort. The war cries surged over the plain and were heard nearly thirty miles away. And now at last Siegfried came face to face with the strong Saxon leader, Liudeger. This was what he had longed for —and his enemy was no less glad to enter in hand to

hand combat with the young commander of the Burgundians.

When Liudeger saw Siegfried's upraised sword, he was filled with wrath. He met him with a tremendous impact. One of the Danes had escaped and told the Saxon of his brother's capture. Liudeger did not doubt that this bare-headed young fighter was guilty of Liudegast's falling. The blows of the Saxon were so powerful that Greyfell reeled and nearly fell. All around the two the battle still waged. Noble princes from each side stood their ground. Above the helmets, spears cut through the air like silver birds. Bucklers and shields were colored blood red. Men were unhorsed and fell moaning to the earth where oncoming chargers trampled them.

In the midst of the tumult and fury, Siegfried the brave and Liudeger the vengeful, rushed at each other. At last the shield-plates of the Saxon flew off at a blow from Siegfried's sword. It was at that moment Sir Liudeger saw the dragon on Siegfried's shield. He recognized Fafnir's image and he knew it was the great Siegfried of the horned skin who was his enemy. The Saxon lifted his hand for peace and blew upon his horn. Then he cried loudly:

"Desist from strife, brave heroes. Before me stands the son of Siegmund the Volsung, the strong and invincible Horned Siegfried. The foul fiend himself has sent this unconquerable warrior to Saxon land."

At the command of the king, banners were lowered and peace was granted. But the end of the day was not

marked for Liudeger. He must follow the lead of the brave Siegfried to the court on the Rhine where he was to give himself up as a hostage to King Giuki.

The Burgundians set forth and Hagen and Gunther who had come up to the front with his men, rounded up the hosts of Saxons like so many heads of cattle. These they led forth captive to the Rhine. Ahead of the armies, rode the squires to tell all those at the court of the victory of the Burgundians.

And in the presence of the King and Queen Grimhild and the noble women of the castle, a certain squire was bidden to tell all that he had seen of the battle. The envoy was blood-stained and his clothes were in tatters. His face was pale and lined with weariness. But he spoke joyfully of the deeds of the men of the Rhinelands:

"Ne'er a coward did we have, but to tell the truth, O noble king, none rode so well in the strife and fray as did the noble stranger from the north called Siegfried. The armor of men was cleft by his sword, the helmets of men sliced open by his blade. His horse was like a wild bull fighting for its life. Spears bounced off the hero's hauberk as if they had no points to pierce him. Whatever the other knights did in the strife—whether Dankwart or Hagen or Gunther or all the other men of the king, 'twas but a child's play at war compared with the deeds of Siegfried, the son of Siegmund. Great woe has been done by the Burgundians. The love of many a Saxon maid lies dead upon the plain. The proud Burgundians acquitted them-

selves so well they can preserve their honor henceforth without the taint of shame. Sindolt and Hunolt, Gunther's men, Rumolt the brave and many others have done such deeds that Liudeger may well rue the moment he planned to make war upon the men of the Rhine."

"And was Siegfried really so very brave?" came the shy hesitant voice of Gudrun. The interest of the listeners was so centered upon the young envoy, no one noticed the flush that stained Gudrun's cheeks.

"Of Siegfried—the minstrels will sing. It is not for one so poor at words as I am to tell the deeds of the dragon-killer," said the boy. "It was he who captured both kings single-handed. He brings them here as hostages, as well as armies and weapons and promises of treasures in property and land."

"Hark—I thought I heard a distant roar like thunder," said the king.

Those who sat waiting knew that the heroes were coming home. The far-away thudding was the sound of troops and horsemen. The ladies flew to the casement windows and the King and his guard made ready to go forth to the courtyard to welcome the warriors home.

After a short interval, high-mettled warriors were seen riding into the land of the Burgundians. There came the champions, the wounded and the captive. The king hailed his hosts. Men alighted from their steeds before the palace. They held aloft their riven shields and battered helms. The king gave orders to

minister to the wounded and to give food and drink to the enemy as well as his own men. Then he asked how many of the Burgundians had fallen.

"Sixty men were lost, sire," said Gunther sadly.

"They shall be mourned," said the king, "but they died upon the march, the ending a true hero would choose for himself so let us not grieve too deeply."

Then Liudegast and Liudeger were led before King Giuki. The old man surveyed them with gentle eyes: "You are welcome here," he said, "though much damage has been done because of you."

"You are well repaid," said Liudeger bitterly, "and you may indeed welcome us for such noble hostages were never before taken by any king."

"We offer you all our great store of wealth if you will but have mercy toward your foes," said Liudegast.

"You are both free," said Giuki slowly, "only this I must ask of you—a promise that you do not leave my land against my will."

"You mean this?" Liudeger cried.

"I have no desire to continue fighting you," smiled Giuki.

"You are a great king," Liudegast said, "greater far than my brother or myself. We were greedy for power and more power and now we have lost all."

The two captives pledged their troth not to leave the land of the Burgundians without permission. Then, at Giuki's order, they were taken to splendid lodgings and given food and drink.

For hours the city was in a pleasant and merry

confusion. Gay soldiers gathered together their battered shields for keepsakes. Bloody saddles were hidden away that the good women would not weep to see what their lords had witnessed. Whole armies of leeches were kept busy healing wounds. Soon word was brought to the King that the armies who had come to join him from south of his kingdom, wished to return to their homes. Giuki asked Gunther how he might best reward them.

"Let them ride away now, father, for fair women await their return with anxious hearts. But let it be known to them that in six weeks they may come here to a great feast where treasures worthy of their acceptance will be waiting. By then the wounded will be well, and all can take part in a day of rejoicing."

This the heralds proclaimed throughout the city, and men rode away with plans to return on the day of the promised celebration.

At last the city was quiet. Lights flared in the houses and many a story was told far into the night of the golden-haired Siegfried whose prowess could not be equalled by mortal man. At that very moment, Siegfried entered the vast hall of the king and kneeling before Giuki, made a request.

"Oh King, long have I dwelt among the Burgundians. Many moons have passed since first I trampled the roses in Gudrun's garden. Now I must ask your permission to leave the city. Far in the northland, a proud Viking awaits my coming. A promise lies between us that I will return to Hlymdale in the spring."

Gunther looked appealingly at Siegfried. The love of the Burgundian for the young Norseman was stronger than ever before. He had watched Siegfried on the battlefield and found a hundred new qualities to love in his foster-brother.

"We cannot ask favors of you, Siegfried—for you have done more for this kingdom than any Burgundian. But will you grant an old man's whim and remain for the feast of celebration six weeks from this night?" asked King Giuki.

"Of course he must stay," Hagen said, "it is he who made the feast possible." Even Siegfried realized that this was a great tribute from the gloomy warrior.

"It would be no true celebration without you to win the tourney," Gudrun's gentle voice murmured.

But it was Gunther's silence that finally decided Siegfried. He saw that his foster brother could not speak so deeply were his feelings in the matter. He would stay, then. After all it would not be much later than spring when he returned to Brynhild and how much more glorious his coming would be with tales of the great feast in the Rhinelands to add to the story of battle.

Chapter XX

THE MEAD OF GRIMHILD

THERE was peace in Burgundy. The cool grey stones of Giuki's castle were safe from destruction. Fair women might sit at their looms weaving threads of purple and gold without fear that an oncoming host swept nearer. The shepherds and bondsmen in the cottages outside the court walls slept dreamlessly for they knew that peace and safety lay over the city. The blue-clad armies had come back victorious. Swords were sheathed. Battle was done. Horned Siegfried had banished fear from the Rhinelands.

Each night in the hall of kings, the minstrels sang of the Northman's deeds. For the hundredth time came the clash of cymbals to tell of the song of Siegfried. There was silence in the great bare room. High men sat upon seats carved in the stone walls, and they were like a part of the stone as they listened. In one corner lying upon a silken couch was Gudrun surrounded by her maidens, and the dark Grimhild sat near, watching her sons with glittering eyes. She saw gentle Gunther at his father's side, his eyes ever upon Siegfried's fair form; Hagen with his head bowed moodily; Guttorm with the radiance of youthful joy lifting him to high heaven.

Siegfried stood apart. The minstrel's song, the homage of great men, the cool peace of Giuki's hall, filled him with a vast impatience. Now that he had promised to stay until Giuki's feast of victory, he ached to be gone. The thought of Brynhild was like fire in his brain. He could see her plainly in his mind—as he had last looked upon her, dressed in the sea-green robe, with her dark coppery hair flying like burnished wings. Above the song of the minstrel—telling of Fafnir, the fated ring, the mist children—Siegfried seemed to hear the voice of the helm maiden. Now it was gentle as she mocked his youth. Now he heard her wild laughter as she cried out despairingly for her lost Valhalla. And he remembered her fierce denial that they were meant for each other. Perhaps she had been right. The ring of Andvari had plighted their troth. It was an evil symbol. Siegfried who had never been afraid, before, trembled as he thought of these things.

The song and the clanking of the cups continued far into the night. But Siegfried did not join in the merriment. From time to time he went to the high narrow windows that were like panels of night-blue against the stone, and looked far out over the leagues of roses drooping in the moonlight. He was a stranger among his friends. Gunther grieved because he did not know the thoughts that troubled his blood-brother.

And now as each day brought the feast of victory nearer, the gayety of the Burgundians reached a mad climax. Carts bearing the spoils of war were driven through the streets of the town, and weavers, herds-

men, and vassals all snatched at the treasure. So bare-foot men in coarse tunics flaunted veils of gold and webs of pearls and the mischievous boys wore jeweled crowns and shimmering helms on their sun-bleached heads. "This is the wealth that Siegfried has brought us," they cried, and no one denied their words. The whole world outside the hall of the kings rejoiced.

But within the grey stone walls of Giuki's castle, curious things had come to pass. The workings of fate had visited the stately halls. Stone walls and moats and brawny guardsmen were powerless to protect the household against the laughing Norns, and the figures of the three dread wraiths drifted in with the shade to stalk the peace of the children of Giuki.

The old king felt the nearness of hurtful things, and he watched with anxious eyes those he loved best. And so it was he saw that his lovely daughter, Gudrun, languished and grew as white as the waxy roses in her garden. He was startled by the change and wondered what caused it. Calling her brothers to him, he questioned them, thinking they knew her better than anyone else on earth.

"Gunther, know you why our Gudrun droops like a flower?" said the king. "Her eyes are sad and her sweet mouth downward curving."

Gunther shook his head in bewilderment. He had not even seen the change in her. He was far too concerned over his own unhappiness at losing Siegfried to have noticed the misery of another. Guttorm shrugged his shoulders carelessly and said in answer

to his father's question: "It is spring, father—a maiden always languishes in this season."

But Hagen the gloomy-hearted foretold what Gudrun suffered:

"The golden-haired son of the northlands has brought this wistfulness to Gudrun's eyes," he said. "None loves my sister as I do and I can read her as easily as the runes upon my own sword. Long ago I saw that her dream of Siegfried boded no good. She grieves, O King, because she loves and is unloved."

"Hagen, Hagen," sighed the king, "you were ever one to be morbid. You read a troublous thing that is not there. Gudrun's love is for her brothers—perhaps her greatest love is for you alone. She has known since first he came here that Siegfried's heart lies in the keeping of the Valkyrie Brynhild. She has not grieved before."

"Love comes as softly as the summer wind," said Hagen bitterly. "You will see in good time that I am right, father. One day Siegfried was only another brother to our Gudrun—the next he was a mysterious hero who conquered with a sword of the gods and who stirred her young heart unmercifully. One thing I would say to you, O King. If the hero Siegfried were not leaving of his own accord, I would see that he left by force."

"And yet you too urged him to stay on until the feast," said the king.

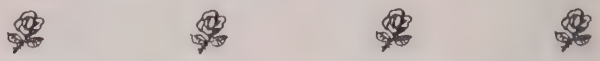
"And since that ill-gotten time, would have torn out my tongue," cried Hagen fiercely. "It is since our

troops returned from the battlefield singing the praise of Siegfried, that Gudrun has grown sad. Her soft eyes dim with tears whenever she sees the proud Viking standing at the windows of your castle which look to the northward. Siegfried longs to go to Brynhild, and Gudrun sees his longing."

When good King Giuki repeated Hagen's fears to Queen Grimhild, she flushed with anger to learn of her favorite son's concern for Gudrun. Her jealous heart was filled with hate. She vowed that Hagen must not have reason to feel sorry for his sister lest it draw them closer together. So great was Grimhild's fury that she paced the narrow bounds of her chamber one entire night. As the pale light of morning dawned, she saw clearly what to do. Gudrun must be made happy and then Hagen would put her from his mind. In the past he had paid slight attention to his pretty sister because he knew she did not need him. There was a way where Gudrun would never need Hagen again. Horned Siegfried must take the little princess into his keeping!

While Grimhild brooded over her dark plans, Gudrun ran through the hedges of roses like a frightened deer. She found a lonely spot where she could fling herself upon the ground to think. What was this strange unrest? What secret desire troubled her? Her plaintive voice mingled with the whispering of the flowers and her words might have been the sighing of the wind: "I am frail and he is glorious; I am afraid and he has no fear. I am innocent and he is wise."

And even as she lay hidden among the fragrant roses, she saw the bright head of Siegfried framed in the castle windows, looking to the northward. She knew his longing, and knowing it, she wept.



Below the Queen's window the minstrels sang. Hosts of men crowded the courtyard. It might have been war. The castle gates were flung wide and a steady stream of soldiers poured through. They came wearing their finest garments and flaunting their most brilliant weapons. But their faces were not the faces of warriors. Song was on their lips and laughter in their eyes. It was the day of the feast of victory.

Grimhild stood at the narrow casement and looked out over the city. She could see the knights riding to the lists. The men who had come from the south Rhinelands had brought their tents and pitched them on the plain outside the city wall. The encampment looked like the sails of hundreds of ships. Wagons covered with purple canopies moved slowly in the direction of the jousting grounds. Men from many kingdoms were gathered here: the fair-haired men of Hesse, the rugged soldiers from the black forests, fugitives from Saxony and the stern troops of Danes. Under the trees in the courtyard were vast kegs of ale and stalls where maidens served yellow cheese and dark bread. Every moment new guests arrived. Some came with bandaged arms or legs; some were carried by their friends who did not wish the wounded to

stay at home; some lurched through the famous gate of Giuki's court, dizzy with wine and rejoicing. This was the feast day for all. At night the captains would sit at the table of the king within the castle. But now the commoners were welcome. They lay on the hard stones munching their bread and cheese and quaffing their mugs of ale. They clambered over the castle walls when the gateway was blocked by processions of people. And no one denied them what they pleased.

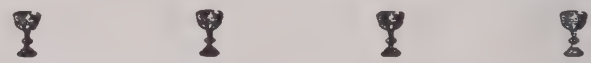
Grimhild looked down and saw the king and her sons riding to the lists. They wore coats glowing with precious gems and their horses were decked with roses. She saw Siegfried come riding—with soldiers beside him, before him,—almost upon him. He wore a black mantle studded with gold and his golden hair was blowing in the breeze. A babbling of voices arose until it was like one mighty voice: "All hail—all hail to Siegfried!"

Grimhild watched until the royal party had passed through the gate and was lost in the crush outside the wall. The sun was high in the heavens. By the time it had gone down in the west, the Queen would be ready to carry out her dark plan. She turned from the window and walked softly to the great stone hearth where blue flames were burning. In a pot that hung above the fire a liquid bubbled and steamed. Grimhild bent over it and her pale haughty features took on the sneering look of a witch-wife. Reaching into her pocket she brought forth the petal of a red rose and the petal of a white one. She flung them into the pot where they

swirled for a moment before they were sucked down below the surface. Then she chanted to herself:

"A cold and bitter cup shall Siegfried drink to forget Brynhild. Mixed with the might of the earth and ice-cold sea water, the herbs of the wood, burnt acorns, the petals of Gudrun's roses and a golden hair from the Viking's head. But it is the love-rune carved on the chip of a black oak that will wed Gudrun to his proud heart."

And now Grimhild was ready for the evening. When Siegfried entered the banquet hall she would await him with the cup of mead she had brewed.



Night came. The city flamed with the bonfires built by the wandering troops. There was a pulsing quiet in the air. The commoners had had their day of rejoicing. They rested together, displaying their wounds of war, boasting of their feats in battle, recounting daring deeds of the hunt and wagering upon matters as serious as the king's strength and as silly as the number of cobblestones in his courtyard.

Evening was dedicated to a celebration for the patricians. The great hall of kings, empty and still, awaited the coming of the guests. Blue lights flared and golden fires ran over the edges of the dishes that held them. The long tables were covered with scarlet cloths and laid with golden plates bordered in pearls. A luminous blue glass reflected the vivid cloths and was changed into a rich purple. Shining copper bowls

studded with silver points of light were heaped with pyramids of fruit to form the brilliant centerpiece. There was the pungent smell of burning incense. The vassals hurried forth from the great kitchens with giant platters of roasts—sheep cooked in sweet wine, antelopes basted golden brown, savory birds, oxen and immense wild boars whose wide open jaws were stuffed with delicately spiced apples. The musicians took their place beneath the vaulted windows and to the soft accompaniment of the lyre chanted the songs of the heroes as they entered.

The lesser men were first to come, so that a glorious assembly would be found waiting when the King reached the banquet hall. Then sang the minstrels of Sir Folker, himself a minstrel too, and bearer of the battle flag, of Pusolt the giant who guarded the roses of Gudrun, of the champions Dankwart, Sindolt, Ortwin, and Hunolt. They sang of merry Guttorm who had not yet grown to full manhood and who was happy as a forest bird the whole day long. And they sang of Hagen the gloomy-hearted whose shaggy brows hid eyes that glittered like steel and whose heart was like stone that softened only for the sake of winsome Gudrun. Gunther came. The songs were loud in his praise. He would be the next king by the common choice of all of Burgundy. Together came Giuki the king and Horned Siegfried—the romantic picture of a frail old man leaning on the arm of a bronzed young hero. The golden crown of Giuki rested on his silver hair—and the silver wreath that Siegfried wore was entwined

in his locks of gold. As opposite in all things as in this, were the two men. King Giuki loved gentleness —and Siegfried sternness. The Burgundians loved luxuries and the Northmen wished to endure hardship. Indeed at that very moment Siegfried was viewing the enormous extravagance of dainties set before them, and remembering a story that Mimir had once told him of old Starkad of the north—how the rugged warrior was invited to feast with Ingild and the sons of Swerting. When Starkad beheld the magnificent feast, he scorned its wantonness and steeled his appetite against this foreign fashion of the table. He protested against the outlandish Teuton habits that had come into the northlands and cried:

"The food of valiant men is raw . . . of old, no man put flagons on the tables; the steward filled the cup from the butt and no bedizened lackey heaped the platter with dainties. The flighty and skittish wife of Ingild tickles the palate with a new-fangled feast, she pursues the zest of an unknown flavor, raging to load all the tables with dishes yet more richly than before."

And Siegfried seeing the turnips, the shellfish in rows, the cakes swimming in juice, the herb sauces and the roasted fowls, chuckled to think of the sturdy son of the soil who had denounced the lavish morsels for a smoky and rancid fare that he ate alone in a snow-drift. More than ever the young Northman longed to leave the land of the Burgundians.

The songs that welcomed King Giuki and Horned Siegfried were drowned in the clamor of voices raised

in greeting. It was easy to see the great love that the Burgundians bore these two. They cheered until King Giuki and his chieftains stood at their places and lifted their hands for silence. Then the whole vast assembly turned toward the door, awaiting the coming of the queen and the princess, accompanied by their train of lovely maidens.

Suddenly they heard the arrogant voice of Grimhild the queen. "Hurry along, little one," she said. "Put away this listless air. We go to a feast of triumph, do not forget."

There was a subdued murmur and a moment later Gudrun stepped through the doorway, her golden head bowed shyly beneath the lamp suspended above the entrance, and her tiny golden sandals clattering on the stone floor. Her creamy robe with flowing sleeves was bound tightly at her slim waist by a rope of rubies and over her shoulders hung a short wine-colored cape of rare material. She walked like a princess—her slender body swaying with the music and there was a regal look about her as she stood in the flare of hundreds of candelabras.

A soft sighing went through the hall. Gudrun, the daughter of Guiki, was sought by many men. The champions of the Rhinelands were startled by her delicate beauty. They longed to fight new battles that they might gain her approval. She did not seem to even hear their whisperings. She walked straightway to the seat between Gunther and her father. For a moment it seemed as if she wavered when she passed by

Siegfried, but she did not speak and he bowed to her gravely as the other noble men did.

King Giuki received her and the queen took her place at the opposite end of the long table. With ceremony, they were seated. To the right were the warriors and to the left the prophets of the Temple, their curious purple mantles hanging straight from their shoulders to their sandled feet. Later the task of the priests would be the sacrificing of beasts upon the altars that the gods might know the gratitude of the people of Burgundy.

Soon the presence of Grimhild and her gentle daughter were forgotten. Men leaned their elbows upon the table and talked hotly of the battlefield. They crunched the bones of roasted dainties and rudely drank their fill from the royal tankards. When the dancers came to entertain them, they shouted mirthfully at the twisting figures and applauded the strange bird cries that the entertainers used to attract attention.

Gudrun felt her head grow dizzy at the scene before her. The lighted censers with their curling smoke seemed like witch-cauldrons casting their evil spell over the hall. She shivered with dread and knew not what she feared. Once she looked at Siegfried with an eager flush staining her pale cheeks. But she was plunged into sadness again. He did not meet her gaze, and the look he wore suggested that his thoughts were far away from the feast of victory.. Indeed the stern Northman was thinking at that very moment: "And how can they all grow sick with love at the sight of

this pleasant child Gudrun. In truth she is sweet to gaze upon but she is like a flower that droops at the slightest hint of harshness. I wonder at the look of fright in her eyes—and I remember the fearless light in another woman's face."

There came vassals bearing a display of treasure that had been brought from the land of the Saxons. Naked slaves staggered past the king with ingots of silver on their bare shoulders and bronze plates held aloft on their brown fingertips. There were urns of gold dust and vessels of subtle perfumes—so that a scent of sea-foam and flowers filled the air. Men passed, wearing the hides of wild beasts that had come from the land of the Danes, and slave girls stood pouring rare jewels from silver vases, like continuous ribbons of light—turquoises, carbuncles, moonstones, beryls, rubies, emeralds, sapphires. Lastly a small cart was drawn through the hall laden with chests of gold and silver coins, some blackened by fire, for in spite of the fall of their king many Saxon villages had not submitted until they were sieged by fire and stone.

Grimhild—unlike Gudrun—did not shrink from the sight of these spoils of war and the uncouth manners of the men of the armies. Her eyes glittered like dark jewels and she leaned forward as eagerly as her sons to see what the vassals carried.

Soon the king arose and began to speak: "Liudegast the Danish chief is now cured of his wounds and would fain ride forth, as would also Liudeger the Saxon. They have sworn lasting peace with me and the men

of the Rhinelands. Advise me, Sir Siegfried, what had best be done?" said Giuki.

"Let them ride forth unhindered," Siegfried said, "but make each of the lordings give surety with his hand that his noble knights will henceforth forbear all hostile riding hither to your land."

"This counsel will I follow," answered Giuki, and the men of Burgundy, secure in their great victory, nodded their assent.

Then the king gave trophies from the spoils to those warriors who were most deserving, and to each captain of the armies from surrounding kingdoms, enough gold to reward each soldier who had fought for Burgundy. And after he had awarded each of his own sons a jeweled sword as a token for his bravery, none remained empty-handed save the greatest of them all, who was Siegfried.

"And what for Siegfried?" cried Gunther. Others took up his query and the hall resounded with the Northman's name.

"I cannot offer treasure to the Horned Siegfried when he is already owner of the greatest hoard on earth—the Nibelung treasure," said King Giuki. "I cannot give a sword to one who owns a sword of the gods, nor a coat-of-mail to one who wears a golden hauberk. There is naught for me to assign noble Siegfried but the drink of honor that is given by this household to the worthiest among men. Let the wine be poured into a golden bowl of transparent glass reflecting the faces of our guests who are gathered here. Let

the hands of Queen Grimhild prepare the drink and the hands of fair Gudrun the princess carry it to Lord Siegfried."

The men of Burgundy were pleased. It was right that Siegfried should receive a greater gift than theirs. A drink of honor seemed a splendid thing, symbolic of the love and gratitude the Burgundians bore the Northman. They watched the proud figure of Grimhild sweep down the length of the hall as she went to the wine-tables to mix the drink for Siegfried. They turned to look curiously at fair Gudrun who was to hand the bowl to the hero with her own small hands. She was as white as death and her eyes were frightened. All save Hagen thought that the princess feared the strong young hero. They smiled tenderly at her frailty.

At last they saw Grimhild turn from the wine-table. She advanced toward Gudrun with slow majestic steps and they could all see the shimmering golden glass bowl and its contents gloriously gilded by the reflection. Grimhild walked like a woman in a dream. Her eyes watched the gentle movement of the magic liquid. It seemed to be the only thing in the world that existed for her. When she came to Gudrun, she placed the bowl gently into the hands of the little princess, saying: "Go, my child and take the drink of honor to Horned Siegfried."

The vast assembly of men had stopped their merriment. Silence hung over the hall as Gudrun walked with reluctant steps to meet Siegfried. She looked deep into the bowl as if she could not meet his eyes.

Her voice was low and tremulous as she handed him the drink of honor.

"Great joy we have in your abiding here, O Horned Siegfried, and all good things will we put before you to take of us. Thus now, will you take this bowl and drink thereof?"

And the thoughts of the hero were far-wandering—he scarcely heard the words of Gudrun. He dreamed of the helm-maidens whirring in war-play over the earth, and he cried in his heart: "I weary in longing for that Valkyrie of flame." He hesitated a moment before he took the bowl, as if he did not realize what Gudrun offered him, but suddenly he was himself again and he saw the hurt in her eyes as she questioned his refusal. He lifted the shining vessel to his lips and drank.

While the heroes cheered, Gudrun stood before him with her face lifted prayerfully to his, as if she worshipped in the presence of a god. And by a curious trick of light, Siegfried beheld her through the pale and luminous gold of the tilted bowl and found her suddenly more lovely than anything he had ever dreamed. His lips clung long to the upraised bowl that he might gaze upon her before the illusion vanished. The drink had a strange sweet taste that was like honeyed wine. It stung his throat pleasantly. But he was scarcely aware of it—every sense was stirred at the sight of Gudrun transformed by the magic of the light that shone upon her through the glass. Siegfried mused: "If she had really been like this, the spae-maid

While the heroes cheered, Gudrun stood before him with her face lifted prayerfully to his as if she worshipped in the presence of a god

of the wild fire at Hindfell might have been truthful in her prophecy."

He put the bowl down regretfully. For a moment he bent his head. He did not wish to see the face of this glorious woman become once more the innocent mask of child-like Gudrun. But he felt her presence near him. An odd tingling in his blood forced him to open his eyes. He started as if he witnessed some fantasy of fate. The Gudrun before him was the lady of golden light who had watched him as he drank. The same inner radiance smiled from her eyes and her beautifully molded lips. He lifted the bowl again, draining the last drop and letting his eyes find once more the reflected image of the daughter of Giuki. She was—indeed, the same. The bowl dropped with a crash and a hundred golden fragments lay on the stone floor.

"Gudrun!" men heard him cry in amazement.

"Siegfried," her voice answered.

Before anyone could speak, came the mocking voice of Grimhild with words of false sweetness: "Your father, O Siegfried of the north, shall be Giuki, the king and I shall be your mother. Gunther and Hagen and Guttorm shall be your brethren and all this shall be sworn with oaths, each to each. And surely shall the like of you two never be found on earth—fair Gudrun of the rose garden and Horned Siegfried of the Vikings."

Siegfried listened to these words and cried, "It shall be so—Guiki, good king of Burgundy. Many times

you have asked me what reward I desire. It is Gudrun I wish."

Thus Siegfried asked for Gudrun when he was already pledged to another, for with the drinking of that mead of Grimhild's evil brewing, all memory of Brynhild had departed from him.

The men of Burgundy stood transfixed. They heard the voice of Gunther: "All things that may be we will do for you; both dominion shall you have and our sister—freely and unprayed for, whom another man would not receive for all his prayers."

Only Gudrun remained troubled. The voice of her mother rang in her mind. The shadow of suspicion troubled her. She saw the grim expression Hagen wore. But she trembled with joy when she saw Siegfried's eyes grow tender as he met her gaze and she reached forth her hands to bless him as he knelt there before her.

All night long the feasting continued and the gaiety ran high. While the captains of other kingdoms toasted one another, the royal family talked together. Soon it was whispered that the bridal would be held the day after the armies left the city. Grimhild and Gudrun went from the hall followed by their train of maidens, and as dawn came nearer the assembly slowly broke up. Siegfried and Gunther were left together.

Now this Siegfried was a new Siegfried to Gunther's eyes. Joy and unrestrained excitement flowed from the Northman's very being. And Gunther who believed only what he saw before him, forgot to question how

this change had come to be. And suddenly—rejoicing with his blood-brother—the desire came over him to possess himself some radiant thing to uplift him.

"Siegfried—I was wrong, then—I had supposed that it was Brynhild, the Valkyrie, that you loved. Now that I find it is not so, I would take this maiden for myself. Fair blooms your life and fortune—I would mine own were the same. I have come to stand in awe and reverence of this splendid woman of Hlymdale—think you she would have me?"

Siegfried frowned for a moment as if the name were unfamiliar to his ears. Then he patted Gunther fraternally on the shoulder: "You say she is a friend of mine—why then, Gunther, she cannot help loving you because we love each other."

Scarcely had he spoken when a curious sound came to their ears. It was like a giant wind sweeping the sky. Gunther and Siegfried rushed to the casements. A cold rain began to beat down upon the terraces of the castle. The volumes of cascading water hid everything from sight, and it seemed as if silver walls were falling from the sky to imprison the castle of Giuki. Again they heard the curious rushing sound.

"What can it be?" cried Gunther.

Siegfried leaned forth and at the same moment the rain lessened, disclosing a flock of sky ravens circling in the air in black spirals, beating their wings and croaking hoarsely. Siegfried laughed and said with a note of relief in his voice:

"Strange, the foreboding I had. What did that

rushing noise remind you of, Gunther? I seem to remember hearing it before—and yet I cannot place it in my mind."

"I know not," said Gunther, "but a Viking once described to me the rushing thunder of the war-choosers of Valhalla. The sound of their heavenly flight must be somewhat like that."

Siegfried looked startled for a moment and then he shrugged his shoulders as if to dismiss the thing from his mind.

All day long cold rain fell upon the land of Burgundy. From time to time the portals of Giuki's castle opened and men of the king's guard, like wet ghosts of the sea, came to warm themselves in the fire-hall.

Chapter XXI

THE NORNS OF YGGDRASIL

THERE came a day when the men of Giuki's court stood mounted on the walls of the city watching the troops from the Rhinelands depart. Long arrays of armed men marched away. The feast day was over. And the Burgundians knew that Siegfried and Gudrun would be betrothed before another nightfall.

While North-over-the-sea in Siegfried's own land, others knew that the noblest Viking among them would be wedded by the hand of the goddess, Var, to Gudrun of the Rose Garden.

Where the Forest loomed, that same ash of Yggdrasil that had harbored the child Siegfried stood unchanged. The glades beneath the tree were filled with drifting mists of blue gloaming just as they had been when Siegfried walked that way. Ratatosk, the impudent squirrel, still raced up and down the rugged trunk, bearing the messages of the wise hawk to Nidhog, the worm who gnawed the roots of the ash. The Well of Urd had disappeared. Upon the death of its owner, Mimir, the waters had dried away. The grotto where the dwarf had lived with Siegfried was so overgrown with moss and vines that no one could have found the entrance. It might have been supposed that Siegfried

was forgotten by the enchanted ones who dwelt here.

Instead—at the very moment when the people of the royal court of the Burgundians walked to the bridal benches to see their princess wed to Siegfried of the northlands, the three Norns who shaped the destiny and future life of all Northmen sat in their hall beneath the trunk of Yggdrasil, saying of Siegfried:

"We, who have spun the threads of fate at the birth of every child, know now what has befallen Siegfried."

Urd, the Norn who could tell all things of the past, said softly: "Odin, the Wanderer, has watched over him until now—hence all that he has thus far endured has been beautiful and fine."

Verdandi, the present, sighed as she whispered: "Odin, the Wanderer, deserts him now and the treachery of Grimhild has wrought a miracle of evil."

Skuld, the future, shivered and covered her eyes with her frail hands as if she could not bear to look upon the vision that lay before her.

The dead leaves floated to the earth from the great ash tree and lay like forgotten days with the rest of their kind.

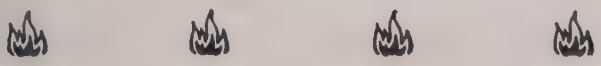
And south of the Forest and the wastelands, where the sea drifts touched the coast, Heimir, the foster-father of Brynhild, walked in grief. He was a man full of lore and ancient things were stored in his mind, and so it was he knew what drove Brynhild from Hlymdale. He had seen her come storming from her chamber late one night when a Viking moon shone in the sky and the sea was a silver heath. She had

stood on the shore and cried the call of the Valkyries to the sky. He could hear it still—the warlike challenge and the ringing exultant song: *"Hojotoho! Hojotoho! Heiaha! Heiaha! Hojotoho!"* And there had come the rushing of her helm-maidens on their war steeds to carry her away from the hurt of mortal things.

High on the peaks of Hindfell, Brynhild the exultant awaited the moment of Siegfried's betrothal. Not yet was he lost to her. Would he be roused from the effects of Grimhild's mead before he was wed to Gudrun? Brynhild the candid—the brave, grew each moment more fiercely resentful. She who had prophesied this thing longed now to deny its being. All night long she sat on the lonely peaks and another day passed. The warlike Valkyrie suffered as the champion suffers who can battle no longer. Out of the ranks, compelled to sit by the side of the conflict, and await its outcome —this now was Brynhild's fate.

It was dusk of the second day when in faraway Burgundy, Siegfried, beneath the spell of the mead, vowed eternal vows with Gudrun, and as he spoke the hedge of flames that had been slaked long since, leaped up and encircled Hindfell.

Once more Brynhild returned to loneliness. Rather to live unloved than loved by a mortal weaker than the gods. The fiery hedge would protect her from any suitor who came that way.



Even the wise-wife Grimhild could not tell if Siegfried regretted his deed, and no one in the kingdom of the Rhine knew if the image of the Valkyrie Brynhild was still hidden from the Viking hero. To all outward appearance, Lord Siegfried became the devoted husband of lovely Gudrun and lived the life of a high noble of Burgundy. If there were times when Gudrun read a look of sternness in his face, she wisely kept her peace. And even when Hagen, whom she had long worshipped, questioned her, she smiled quietly and answered that there was naught save happiness between the Northman and herself.

Gunther, seeing this happiness, longed more ardently than ever to set forth in a galley, sailing North-over-the-sea to Brynhild. Because he had always told his foster-brother the secretmost things in his heart, it was natural for him to speak of this dream to Siegfried.

"I will go down to the sea and hence to Brynhild," said Gunther to Siegfried. "For her love I will risk my life and gladly lose it if she becomes not my wife. The words you have spoken of her beauty and her exultant spirit have made me unable to think of any other maiden."

"I counsel you against this," Siegfried said quietly. "There are two Brynhild's—one is the fair-hearted woman whom I tarried with, another the fierce helm-queen. It is said that her respect for mortal is none. She battles to kill unless she chances not to fight at all as it was with me. Give over the journey, Gunther, and find you some gentler maid of the south."

"Never was woman born so strong and bold that I might not vanquish her with my own hand," boasted Gunther.

"Be still," Siegfried said shortly, "You do not know her strength."

At that moment Hagen the grim-hearted chanced upon the foster-brothers and listened to their speech.

"I would advise you, Gunther," he said, "to take Siegfried with you upon your journey. He has made this same pilgrimage before, is it not so, Lord Siegfried —he should know well how matters stand with Brynhild."

Siegfried's expression did not change at this deliberate taunt of Hagen's. He did not look at Gunther as his foster-brother spoke again: "Will you help me, Siegfried? Perhaps I have counted my strength too high in daring to match it with a helm-maiden's."

Siegfried could not deny Gunther's request. Besides—he knew that the one chance for Gunther's safe return lay in his own presence at Brynhild's portal.

"I will go with you, Gunther. Once more let me urge you against this deed. Brynhild, the Valkyrie is born of the clouds and the rushing winds. She loves the gods and not men of mortal birth. Because she has disobeyed great Odin she is kept away from Valhalla and away from the company of her sisters. It is better for her to live in loneliness, dreaming of her days of battle, than to walk as an earthly queen."

"Nay, Siegfried—it is too late to dissuade me. More than life itself, I desire Brynhild."

Siegfried saw his brother had spoken truthfully from a heart of love.

"Make ready, then, Gunther. All that you need to do is prepare a seaworthy galley and to choose a bodyguard of twelve noble knights. The success of this journey will lie with myself. The tarn-cap I won from Alberich the dwarf will render me invisible. So fierce and proud a queen must be subdued by the invisible. You who are in full sight of her will stand small chance of victory."

"Lord Siegfried speaks sensibly," Hagen remarked, and again Siegfried sensed the mockery in his voice.

"And will you—perchance—come with us?" Siegfried demanded.

"Nay—your absence will give me a moment with my sister," Hagen retorted.

"Gudrun must be told of this," said Gunther, "she will rejoice that another queen comes to Burgundy."

But when Gudrun heard of the journey her lord Siegfried was to make with her elder brother, she was sad and downcast. Her soft eyes were filled with tears and she lost her womanliness and became the childlike Gudrun again. "O Gunther, dear brother, you might tarry here a while and pay court to other maidens in a way that does not risk your life. You can find a wife of high birth nearer home."

Then Gunther was gay-hearted. "Naught can happen to me with Lord Siegfried to aid me," he laughed, and he did not understand the look of fright that came into Gudrun's eyes.

The brave galley set sail with Gunther himself at the helm. There were chapmen on the ship as well as the twelve knights, and these common shipmen made merry. They gathered about the cask of ale that stood beside the mast, and if the chest was locked, they found as much pleasure over their porridge. The ship rode well, its stout sheet-rope tightened by the breeze. They sailed North-over-the-sea for many days in fair weather. Siegfried stood upon the deck, his feet wide apart and his arms folded, watching the swirling waters. A tremendous longing surged over him to see his own people again. For a year he had been one of the Burgundians—and now a host of memories swept over him. There were the Volsungs to remember, his sturdy ancestors whom he must never betray by any weakness. There was Hjordis the lovely who had first taught him what tenderness was, and kindly Hjalprek who had given him ships and armies of brave men to go forth and conquer. The salty smell of the sea and the crisp tang in the air recalled a hundred memories. He seemed to see in his mind's eye the whole of the northlands spread out before him. He walked again in an endless forest and he rode his horse on a spray-soaked shore. He obeyed Mimir and was led by the Wanderer. He listened to the foretellings of Gripir and he fought a dragon to a death-duel. The North—against the South! The Vikings stood forth as rugged, dangerous, blood-shedding, ruthless champions beside the princely figures of Burgundy. Siegfried thought of everything that had ever happened to

him—save one thing. Since the dawn when he had awakened to the evil Grimhild had done him, he had never let the vision of Brynhild cross his mind.

At last the ship sighted the towers of Hlymdale. The proud vessel seemed to plunge forward, and as it neared the shore its great oars cut the water so that a white foam covered the surface of the harbor. Siegfried stood at the prow, his golden hair blowing in the breeze.

When the house-carles of Heimir came to him to report the presence of a bare-headed captain of mighty build, the good king hurried to the shore. His hope that this stranger might be Horned Siegfried was realized. But he was destined to another disappointment. It was Gunther who stood forth to speak with him:

"Good king, we seek your foster-daughter, noble Brynhild. I have come far to woo her."

"Ah—Brynhild must wed, it is true," said the old man, "but him whom she weds she must choose herself, freely. That this may be so, she has returned to her mountain castle at Hindfell. The flaming barrier that she has raised to protect herself is a formidable hedge. And whoever shall ride through the fire, meets a new Brynhild in the green garden. She has grown bitter and fierce-hearted. She has never smiled since a certain mead was drunk at the court of Giuki."

"What is the old man saying?" Gunther laughed and whispered to Siegfried.

But the Viking was occupied in saluting the good

king Heimir and in ordering the vessel turned seaward again. Soon the painted galley was scudding along the shore—still farther to the north. And every man upon it—from Horned Siegfried down to the smallest shipman, dreamed of the burning hedge and the beautiful woman who waited behind it.

Chapter XXII

THE WOOING OF BRYNHILD

WHEN the ship turned away from Hlymdale, the sea was as smooth as glass. The galley sailed silently. An illusion of immobility lay over all things. The ship seemed becalmed at the base of the soaring cliffs of the fjords. This way it was for two days until they sighted the shores where the mountain Hindfell stood. Here they were kept at bay by a lashing of waters that hid the treacherous shoals. The storm broke wildly. The galley was like a driven creature. Her chapmen listened helplessly to the flapping of loose sails and the tearing sound of old wood. The air was filled with a murmuring rushing and shrilling. Headway the surf roared and the sea washed the fjords and the fjords were like giant breakers tossed against the sky.

All day the ship struggled over the whale-path. Far beyond the stretch of foam and the length of plain rose the abrupt slope of Hindfell and the golden roof-ridge of the castle of Brynhild, the Valkyrie. At last the red sun began to sink lower and lower in the sky until its rays mingled with the fiery hedge that surrounded Hindfell. With the coming of evening, the wind died and the waters quieted. The galley slaves were ordered to anchor until morning when Prince

Gunther would prepare to leave the ship and ride forth with his company.

Siegfried stood in the pale light, looking over the dreary sea. The world wore a death-cold look. Shoreward, the earth seemed barren of green things and a great loneliness lingered everywhere in sight. Siegfried marveled, remembering that other time when he had come to Hindfell and found the garden as bright as an emerald and seen the luxury and fertility of Brynhild's mountain. The only familiar thing left was the brilliant hedge of clear fire. Soon Gunther joined Siegfried.

"Ah—it is you, Gunther. Hear the screaming of the gulls?"

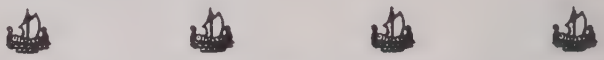
"A sad sound," said Gunther, sighing. The young Burgundian was a sensitive fellow and the melancholy surroundings depressed him.

"Sad—what is this?" laughed Siegfried. "Wait until the lady has said you nay! Do not fear, brother. I will win her—by the gods who deny, she shall be given."

Gunther wondered for a moment what the Northman could mean.

"And now—to sleep—dream once again of the exultant Brynhild, Gunther. Dream of her beauty, her strength, her dauntless will. Another night may find you holding the fragments of that dream, for beauty may be terrible as well as gentle, strength is a warlike virtue—and the will of a woman may put your will to shame."

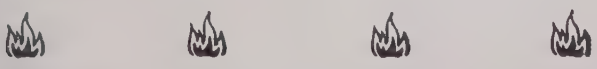
Gunther turned wearily away. Siegfried's prophecies bewildered him. Why should he speak thus of a glorious Valkyrie?



Long before the ship was sighted from Brynhild's tower, the Valkyrie had known of its coming. Soon after the galley had left the Rhine and started North-over-the-sea, Heimdall, the watchman of the gods, had discovered it. All day long Heimdall rode his golden-maned horse back and forth on Bifrost Bridge which followed the curve of the rainbow. Thus he could see the earth and the heavens and he guarded the gods on the mountains of the sky from the mortals below. Heimdall had been chosen warden of the gods because he could do with less sleep than a bird and could see equally well by night and by day for a full hundred leagues distance. He could hear the grass growing—and the growing of a sheep's wool. The sound of his horn of warning could be heard through all worlds.

It so happened that the day Brynhild heard of the ship's coming, she was more bitter with grief than ever before. When she lost Siegfried, she had gathered her courage and called for her Valkyrie sisters. Together they had formed a plan to take her back to Valhalla. Nine Valkyries had mounted their chargers and surrounded Brynhild who rode a small gray horse. Rushing like a cloud-fury, they had galloped off toward the hall of the slain. But as they approached, Syn who guards the door of Valhalla met

them. When Brynhild reached the portal, it swung shut. From door to door she galloped. At each one, Syn stood ready to bar her entrance. The mad chase went on for hours. Brynhild battled to enter her beloved home. But the will of Odin, the Warfather was stronger than hers, and she was forced to ride sorrowfully back to Hindfell. Thus, when she heard than an earthly prince was on his way to woo her, her fury was boundless. She laughed in a wild way and the young Valkyrie maidens who played in her garden, shivered as they saw her striding back and forth. A transfigured Brynhild—with little trace of her former self! Instead of the calm woman with ageless eyes who read wisely ageless things, an impulsive, strong-willed warrior awaited the coming of Gunther. And so, for the number of days it took the ship to sail from the entrance to the sea to the fjords of the Northlands, Brynhild hated him who dared to woo her. She feared nothing. The hedge of fire would protect her—if by some untoward miracle the hero crossed this barrier, the Valkyrie had other plans to kill him or send him away broken and humiliated.



In the light of the morning sun, the galley slaves of the ship from Burgundy waded through the shallow waters bearing the landing bridge upon their bare shoulders. They stood in two columns, implanted in the sea like pillars in a hall-floor. Their glistening shoulders were taut with the strain of the weight they

bore and the muscles of their arms rippled beneath their brown skin. Over the bridge walked Prince Gunther and Lord Siegfried and the array of twelve men. Then came the chapmen leading the excited horses, wild at the sight of land again. Once on the shore the prancing steeds reared and plunged until the knights could quiet them.

The body of mounted men moved slowly over the plain. Gunther and Siegfried were clad in costly garments of royal blue, and the twelve men wore raven black with golden bucklers and brilliant jewels. Their saddles were set with precious stones and gay bells tinkled on their narrow martingales. Well-wrought swords and shining spears covered with sheets of silver engraved in serpent ornamentations, with sockets inlaid with gold, hung down at their sides. As they neared the sheer rocky slopes of Hindfell, they drew in their horses. At the very top of the peaks—like the crest of the mountain itself—rose a fair castle. Six and eighty turrets it had, and a single great tower above the rest. The fortress was built of costly marble—colored a curious bluish green. At the bottom of the fell, a hedge of flames burned—not the same narrow wall of fire that Siegfried had once crossed, but a stretch of blazing turf some thirty feet across. It burned with fitful energy—leaping suddenly upward as it answered the rushing of the wind-bellows—now dying down to a glowing mass that looked like a garden of scarlet brachen.

"When you reach the other side of the flames, wait

for my command before you go farther," Siegfried said.

The twelve knights looked uneasily at the barrier before them. Siegfried started toward it—a slow trot that increased to a faster and faster pace. Gunther followed eagerly. The line of horsemen leaped ahead. For a moment the thundering of hoofs on the turf was deafening. The steeds mingled together like the wing of an attacking cavalry-charge. As they neared the hedge of fire, certain horsemen instinctively drew in their reins. A few steeds reached the very boundary of the blaze and shied with a tremendous wrenching of their bodies.

Greyfell alone cleared the burning brake. Gunther sat upon his rearing horse Goti and watched the marvelous sight before him. He saw the gray body of Siegfried's horse stretch out in the air like a winged carrier of the gods. He saw Siegfried stand in his stirrups and fling his arms outward as if embracing what lay before. And as Greyfell and Siegfried passed over the flames, the fire was slaked. When they reached the other side of the barrier, there was no hedge of flames behind them.

Even as the knights led by Gunther hurried forward, there was a loud rushing sound above them. They looked skyward and saw a host of Valkyries riding to guard Brynhild. And high on the crags of Hindfell, sounded an exultant calling as the helm-maidens prepared for the onslaught of the Burgundians.

"Let us hasten," cried Gunther.

"Nay—you shall wait for my command or not climb a foot of this fell," said Siegfried.

Gunther shrank back before the cold sternness in the voice of his foster-brother.

"What do you mean?" he said in bewilderment.

Siegfried's frown vanished. He put his hand lovingly upon Gunther's shoulder.

"Forgive my quick words. I was only thinking of what confronts us. There must be a plan to match the plan of the wild Valkyries crying on the mountain top. If you had gone your way unheeded—your only escape would have been cut off."

"Escape from what—why are you so serious, Siegfried? You who have never been afraid of anything, speak now like an old woman. You who fought Danes and Saxons and my father's giant guard take elaborate precautions against a bevy of ladies just because they are not exactly mortals," cried Gunther petulantly.

He looked about him as if to enlist the agreement of his followers, but he saw that the twelve knights looked to Siegfried. Perhaps the high mournful song that swept down the fell convinced them that no ordinary maids awaited them.

"Listen, Gunther. Brynhild's strength when she is aroused is greater than yours. You must—as Hagen suggested—let your brother help you win her. I will give everything in my power for your sake—my strength, my cunning, and the magic of the tarn-cap that I won from Alberich. Listen carefully. You

shall do all that Brynhild tells you—she will challenge you to games, for that is the way of her kind. Follow the gestures of the contest. I will don the tarn-cap. It renders me invisible. What a gift! There will be naught but a faint bluishness in the air to mark the place where I stand, wearing the fog-helm."

The knights looked frightened. The ways of magic were strange ways and not to the liking of men who walked in proper paths. Even Gunther looked troubled when he saw Siegfried bring forth a strangely woven cap and lift it to his head. At once the horse Greyfell was riderless!

"Siegfried," Gunther whispered wonderingly.

"Hush," came a faint voice "trust me, brother. And now—on and upward, all of you. Siegfried shall be forgotten as long as we are upon Hindfell and whatsoever Gunther says shall be your law.

The twelve knights, who had been chosen for their beauty and their noble bearing, and not for their wit or imagination, failed to understand any of this that came to pass. Siegfried had vanished—and they dismissed him. Even though they had been told that he walked at Gunther's side, they could not believe it. For a moment they were troubled as they looked back at the horses—fourteen powerful steeds stood at the foot of the mountain—and only thirteen heroes struggled up the steep heights of the fell. Horned Siegfried was not among the Burgundians!

Brynhild heard the loud knocking at her gates.

"What shall we do?" Hrist and Mist—their long dark hair flying behind them, came running to ask her bidding.

"What else—but open, little sisters?" Brynhild smiled queerly.

Then—after their retreating footsteps, she heard the iron portals swing aside and a clear horn blowing. She rose from the great dais. It was not fitting to meet her enemies as a woman—reclining.

"It is Prince Gunther of Burgundy who seeks permission to enter your presence," cried Hrist, as she returned to Brynhild's side.

"He comes alone?" the voice of the Valkyrie struggled to be calm.

"Nay—twelve knights attend him—paltry knights with no look of strength about them. Pretty men—that is all," said Hrist scornfully.

"Bid them enter—and call the Valkyries," said Brynhild.

Then she took her stand—feet wide apart in the warrior's way and a look of tremendous pride and will in her dark grey eyes. Gunther gasped when he saw her. Her short tunic was made of silver links—her long graceful legs were bound tightly with leather skins. Her head was held high and her beautiful shoulders were as well-set as a soldier's. There was only her long coppery hair to mark her as a woman. Her delicately cut profile might have been man or woman—and her wild eyes belonged to a race beyond

mortals. Gathered about her were slender girls with straight dark hair sweeping back from curiously child-like brows. Only their eyes were wild—as Brynhild's were wild, with a look beyond the conception of men.

"What does your journey mean, Lord Gunther? Perhaps you have not heard that strangers are not welcome at Hindfell."

Gunther, bewildered at the vision of Brynhild, could scarcely answer her.

"Gramercy, Lady Brynhild—that you have deigned to let me enter your portal. I have come to woo you —journeying from far Burgundy, hoping to bear you with me on my return passage."

"What madness, young man," Brynhild was scornful. "The customs of the north are not those uncivilized ones of Burgundy where man does not marry maid but field marries field, vineyard marries vineyard, cattle marry cattle. Know you not that Brynhild is not for the wooing of any mortal?"

"Nor any god," said a voice that seemed to come from Gunther's lips and yet sounded far more mocking and deep-toned than the young Burgundian's voice.

Brynhild paled. The whole world knew, then, of her dismissal from Valhalla. She raged inwardly and her voice trembled as she tried to speak with her old arrogance.

"Any man who hopes to possess me must play certain games. Should he win I will become his wife. Should I conquer, he shall be killed with his bodyguard. Long ago the hedge of fire was the test I

offered for my heart—it was not difficult enough. Now—the fool who dares to storm my battlements must hurl the stone with me, and afterwards spring and cast the spear."

"Let us play your games," again the voice came—seemingly from Gunther's lips, but the young Burgundian knew it was the invisible Siegfried who spoke.

"You are likely to lose your honor and your life as well. It were wise to think upon this matter," said the Valkyrie sternly.

"Ah—but I am willing to die if you will not become my wife," sighed Gunther. In spite of his wonder at the sight of the warlike Valkyrie he was stirred by her strength and beauty.

"To the games, then," she said abruptly. Then turning once more to face the knights and the children of the Hall of the Slain, she cried defiantly: "Should Prince Gunther lose, you have heard my verdict. Should he win—this shining ring I wear must be taken from my finger. As long as there is a measure of strength in me I shall defend it. With its going—there goes likewise my honor, my faith."

Gunther looked at the shining golden ring. He knew that it must be the famous ring of Andvari that Siegfried had once given with his pledge. Gunther wondered a moment concerning the Northman's youthful deed. Now—certainly, the Valkyrie was forgotten. The Viking thought only of fair young Gudrun. Gunther mused thoughtfully as he gazed at the ring. None might take it from her save her

victor. It was a ring with a strange curse upon it. Gunther wished that the ring had never been mentioned.

Then the Valkyrie left her hall to prepare for the games.

"Hrist," she commanded, "bring me a breastplate of ruddy gold and a shield of glory. I will wear a silken surcoat over my armor—ah, none save a woman would know that silk is harder to cut with a sword than the sternest of meshes."

So Hrist brought her a short green coat made of the silken cloth of Libya with a brilliantly embroidered edging which was like a studding of jewels. When Brynhild marched forth to the ring where the games were to be played, she was radiant with stern array. Beneath the silken coat was a tight bodyguard made of links of gold. Her shield—which Hrist and Mist carried for her—was made of strips of gold as hard as steel and three spans thick beneath the studs. Her shield-thong was a costly band upon which lay jewels as green as emerald garden moss.

When Gunther saw the massive shield, a momentary fear for his honor came over him. He heard the low murmur of one of the knights who said: "How now —Prince Gunther will lose his life. All of us will die. She whom he would make his wife is a giant's bride, in truth."

"I should like to see the spear she will use," whispered another.

And answering this desire, came forth two dark-

haired helm-maidens bearing a spear of amazing size. Three and one-half weights of iron had been wrought to create it. It seemed on first appearance to be broad and unwieldy, but undoubtedly it was stout and of tremendous sharpness. Again Gunther's heart sank. It was not death he minded—but all the Northlands would laugh at the men of Burgundy. What did it mean? Women were not like this. The Brynhild that Siegfried had talked of in their intimate moments together was not this fierce and wild-eyed warrior maid. Gunther heard the mutterings of his own knights: "We who have ever borne the name of knights must lose our lives without defending them. We shall perish at the hands of a woman in a land that is not our own. Would it were Lord Siegfried who fought against this spae-maid." Again Gunther mourned. He had little right to imperil the lives of these innocent men who formed his guard. As he turned to order them back to the ships, he felt something brush his ear and a warm wave like the breath of a man fanned his cheek. He heard a voice say softly: "Courage, Gunther—and fear not. Do as I have said—follow the movements of the game and I will do the rest." Gunther felt reassurance come slowly back—the magic tarncap and Siegfried would save him.

At that moment three magnificent Valkyries came toward the ring, rolling a great heavy stone. They laughed merrily as they saw the stupified expressions on the faces of Gunther's knights. Then—at the

approach of Brynhild—they covered their mouths with their slim brown hands and ran off giggling.

But Brynhild did not smile. Brynhild did not even deign to acknowledge the presence of the stupid knights. Slowly she rolled back the sleeves of her silken jacket. There was a tenseness about her body as she surveyed the stone. Tossing her coppery hair back, she leaned forward with a swift graceful movement. The stone resisted her strength for a moment —and then as the muscles in her smooth bare arms tightened, came up easily from the earth. As slowly as a discus thrower balancing his weights, she lifted the stone—upward and backward until she stood in the position of the thrower—head back—one foot bearing her weight, the other placed forward, ready to receive it as she threw the rock. The stone flew through the air like some cumbersome meteor from the sky that had burned itself out to a cold white ball of ash. Twelve fathoms it soared before it fell with a thud near the banks of the clear garden pool.

A wild cry of throaty laughter came from the Valkyries. The men of Burgundy stood, dumb with wonderment. "Whom has Prince Gunther chosen for a love?" they thought.

Again came the three Valkyries, rolling another stone—perhaps greater than the one that Brynhild had lifted so easily. All eyes were upon Gunther. His sensitive face was flushed and his eyes downcast. He dared not look at the exultant Valkyrie who challenged him—he heard her low taunting laughter. Bending

quickly to the ground that she might not see his despair, Gunther placed his hands upon the stone. It seemed a part of the very mountain itself. He felt not the slightest give though he used all his strength to lift it. Then suddenly—the stone seemed to come to meet him. Upward and backward—as he had seen Brynhild do—he guided the rock while the invisible Siegfried bore its weight. A strange exhilaration flowed through Gunther's veins. For a moment he felt all-powerful—he would vanquish the Valkyrie. Even as he thought these things, he felt the stone taken from his grasp. He watched its flight—with as much wonder as the onlookers—saw it pass over Brynhild's rock and fall unerringly into the silvery pool. There was a splash of brilliant water flashing in the sun. There were the shouts of the Burgundians. There was Brynhild with stern lips and unsmiling eyes. Gunther trembled at what he had done.

And the judges, who were men of Odin, called Gunther, of Burgundy, the victor in the first game. And so it was that tremendous excitement awaited the second contest.

Gracefully Brynhild climbed a peak of Hindfell overlooking the expanse of mossy garden. She stood —a black figure outlined against the golden sky. The sun was behind her and her shadow fell over the ring, a strange angular towering shape. She crouched and leaped. As she sprang through the air—with arms outflung, she was like some grotesque bird as she achieved her splendid flight to the green below.

Clarions sounded their song of praise and the cries of the Valkyries were raised in an unearthly chorus.

And now Gunther, his fear vanished, climbed the peak nimbly. He stood waiting a moment—to be certain that Siegfried was near. "Ready," he heard the voice of his foster-brother say. And Gunther's spring into the air was like that of a stone shot from a sling. He landed gracefully an arm's breadth beyond the spot where the furious Brynhild was standing. Gunther was as amazed as any one who had witnessed the splendid leap, for he knew that it was Siegfried who had jumped bearing the weight of a man in his arms. No one knew of the phantom jumper save Gunther—and it was Gunther's name that was raised in song.

Then Brynhild who had been cold and scornful, lost her proud bearing and turned scarlet with wrath.

"Bring me my spear and the shield of gold," she cried. "And this shall be the test, Prince Gunther. We will throw our spears at the same moment. I must pierce your shield and at the same time avoid your weapon. You must pierce mine and dodge my spear."

"And—should I shatter that shield of gold," said Gunther quietly, "then will I have won three games from you, fair Brynhild—then will you be mine."

"Nay—," Brynhild's eyes glowed with a fierce light, "the ring of Andvari is tight upon my finger—placed there in a pledging dear to my memory. The victor must remove that ring—only one stronger-willed, as

well as stronger-bodied, can take it from me. Unless the ring is gone from my finger, Prince Gunther, I will not be yours to take away from Hindfell."

Gunther set his lips tightly. He was afraid of the ring and what it stood for. There was not a man in the world who did not know of its curse—how death followed in its wake though it were long in coming, how disappointment marked the lives of all who had ever worn it.

"It shall be as you will," he said.

Brynhild grasped the shield and poised the long spear on high. Her hate was so strong at the moment, if Siegfried had not been near to guard Gunther, the young Burgundian would certainly have fallen before her mad thrust. Just as she lunged forward with the spear, Gunther felt his shield taken from his hand, and Siegfried's voice said, "Step quickly sidewise, Gunther." Two spears were thrown simultaneously. Brynhild's sailed past her enemy and struck deeply in the trunk of a great mountain oak. The spear that Siegfried threw struck the shield of the Valkyrie with such force it split asunder and Brynhild fell to the ground. Men who watched said that sparks flew from her armor rings. They saw that the spear had been thrown with the point away from Brynhild so that the beautiful woman would not be pierced. But even the butt of the spear came with such force it stunned her. When Brynhild fell—a fearful cry arose among the Valkyries. Some of them rushed for their steeds and rode away because they could not bear to see

her defeat. Others sang the wild war-cry that slain soldiers welcomed as they lay dying.

Gunther reached Brynhild's side before she opened her eyes. He touched her—tenderly—fearfully. But as he tried to take the ring from her finger, she turned upon him like a fierce young forest creature. Gunther defended himself from the fury of her attack. He was as amazed as she when he heard her cry—the soft yielding cry of a woman—"Ah—you have won—you have truly won—the ring would never have left me for one who was not stronger than myself."

Gunther looked in astonishment at her slender strong hand. The red mark against the brown of her finger showed where the ring of Andvari had been. Siegfried had taken the ring and hidden it!

Chapter XXIII

THE RETURN OF GUNTHER

ONE day the king's guard at the court of Burgundy saw from their outlook on the battlements of the castle, a ship coming down the Rhine, its sparkling rows of oars like the skimming wings of a bird. They gave the word to the guards of the castle and soon it was known throughout Giuki's household that Prince Gunther had come home. By the time the gorgeous ship had ploughed its way through the countless boats that flocked to meet her, nearly all the city had gathered at the shore to see the bride of Gunther. People pushed and jostled to reach the very edge of the bank—not a few tumbled into the cold water and had to be fished out by jeering rescuers. At last the galley was anchored and the bridge of slaves had formed their double column in the water, supporting the carpeted plank that reached from the boat to the shore.

Though none knew it, the first to cross the bridge was Siegfried, wearing the tarn-cap that hid him securely from all eyes. He made his way through the crowd and hastened as far from the shore as possible. It was necessary for him to reach the castle before Brynhild arrived. She must never know that he had been with Gunther at Hindfell.

Then came the twelve knights—proud now, upon their return, that they had travelled so far. It was for them to tell of mountains of ice and tempestuous seas, of a heath of fire and a fell that reached to high heaven. It was for them to speak of Gunther's wooing and winning, and of the bridals that had been held at Hlymdale on the way home. The minstrels heard their words and soon sang them. The stories grew. Soon the stone that was thrown became as big as a boulder, and the leap that was made by the Valkyrie became the flight of a bird. And certain men said that it was a pity Siegfried had had no part in this glory. No song had been sung since the Northman's coming to Burgundy that did not include him.

At last Prince Gunther came, curiously grave and seemingly older than when he had left them. When he reached the shore, he turned and faced the ship—waiting as humbly and as eagerly for Brynhild's appearance as the crowds of people upon the banks of the river.

She came at last—the most glorious of the Valkyries—Brynhild the exultant and the strong-willed. The men of Burgundy had never seen her, for it was only the battlefields of the Northlands that she visited. But their minstrels had traded songs with the scalds beyond the sea, and there was not one among them who had not heard of the high-helmeted maids who went rushing through the heavens singing their song of the slain. She did not disappoint them. Standing upon the deck with the wind blowing her coppery hair, she

looked at them with proud and arrogant eyes of gray. There was strength in her bearing. There was cruelty in her mien. Tragedy had left its mark upon her lips and her candid brow. Suffering and wounded pride held her stiffly—so that she seemed made of stone. She wore a shining haulberk made of silver links. Pride made her cling to a war-guise though now it had to be the poor armor of common men. Brynhild was no longer fortified by the gods and she could not go to battle with bare legs and arms and a simple tunic.

To battle she had come. Even the slow-witted crowd could see that this was no friendly queen who came to Burgundy. She walked with slow deliberate steps, looking straight ahead of her. When she came to Prince Gunther, she passed him by. There was no look of tenderness—but a fleeting glimmer of rage seemed to shake her beautiful body. She stopped as if she would strike him—and then walked proudly on as if he had never existed. And Gunther bowed his head at her slight.

The chariot that was to bear her to the castle, drove off with her alone. The hum of the people became a low roar. When they saw Prince Gunther stride silently with his bodyguard toward the castle, they shouted in anger. Who was this woman to treat their beloved prince like a vassal?

And so it was that Brynhild reached the portal of Giuki's castle ahead of her lord. This was her wish. She desired to meet Siegfried without Gunther near. She must hurt him as he had hurt her. Gunther might

restrain her. No one must keep her from this one bitter act of retribution.

When the portals swept open, Brynhild beheld a garden of brilliant flowers and a pavement of smooth blocks of marble. The castle stood like an immense cold fortress with its four towers mounting guard. The tall narrow windows made curious designs against the solid walls. A door of silver opened and she stepped into a huge hall with a high vaulted ceiling. In the center was a circular pool where ruby-colored fish swam and waxy flowers floated on the surface, trailing their green leaves like long strands of hair. The escort led the new queen to a narrow stairway. Brynhild followed its winding upward passage, her hands touching the cold stone walls as she made her way to the top. Another door—iron the color of ebony in a fantastic design of filagree—opened for her. She found herself in a vast cold room. She who had been accustomed to the crude walls of the northlands where pillars of living trees upheld the simple roofs, where fires burned on rugged hearths and the air was thick with smoke and the sound of rude laughter, beheld this arrogant hall of kings with a shiver of distaste. Her eyes swept the length of the walls and of the ceiling painted with stars. There were no dazzling shields. There were no richly colored hangings. Instead, the cold loneliness of stone. At intervals there were deep recesses in the wall where thrones were built with silver steps leading to the level of the grey floor. And Brynhild saw in her first moment of con-

fused impression that a beautiful old man whose face was strong with a look of all-understanding, had come forward to greet her. The harsh words died on her lips. She had swept like a fury from the ship to Siegfried, but now her hate had vanished. As she looked at the deep sympathy and humanity in the face of King Giuki, she remembered suddenly that she had prophesied all that had come to pass. Siegfried had only followed the destiny of fate and of the cursed ring of Andvari.

Those who had watched her since she entered the hall saw a miraculous change take place. They had seen her come—like a pale priestess bent upon unholy things. Siegfried had met her look of madness and grieved. He had caused this thing. But even as he watched, he saw her eyes close—her stern lips relax—her whole body droop as if in submission. The young Northman rejoiced. Anger had been unworthy of her.

And Grimhild and Hagen watched—with jealous hearts. What had they accomplished by plotting to bring this woman of the furies to Burgundy? And young Guttorm looked at her adoringly. She was the most magnificent creature that he had ever seen.

Gudrun watched—a childish despair surging through her. How could she keep what she loved when magnificent Brynhild was near. She looked quickly at Siegfried. His smile reassured her. But when the change came over Brynhild, when Gudrun saw the proud Valkyrie bow her head as if begging

forgiveness from Siegfried, the princess of Burgundy wept. She was woman enough to know that Brynhild was far more dangerous now than she had been before.

Brynhild spoke first. She tossed back her gleaming hair as if its weight tormented her. She pushed it from her brow as if she were awakening from a dream. Then turning to Siegfried she said: "I have greeted the high men and women of Burgundy and now—my last greeting must be for you. Hail, Siegfried of the horned skin, son of the Volsungs, child of the Wanderer's blessing, slayer of Fafnir, and keeper of the sword Gram. I pray that the same good fortune that has always given you what you willed, remains with you as long as you live on this earth."

The vast hall was silent. This was the kind of a thing that a woman said to her own lord and not to a stranger. Siegfried spoke—a strange fervor in his voice; and Gudrun knew that he walked in other ways and had forgotten her existence.

"Hail, most exultant of women. Knower of all wisdom, sufferer of every sorrow. Hail, wife of my brother Gunther. Let the peace that only the great-hearted can possess follow you to the end of all days."

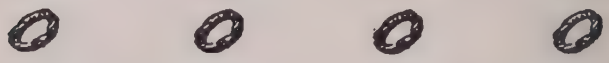
When Gudrun heard these words and saw the glow of serene joy in Brynhild's eyes, she buried her face in her slim hands. Well she knew that her own heart could never be peaceful. She was not wise enough to endure hurtful things well. As she wept softly, she heard the murmur of concern in Siegfried's voice. She

was almost happy for a moment—almost happy until Brynhild spoke and put a strong hand on her shoulder.

"But my dear child," the voice said laughingly, "queens must not weep."

Gudrun ran wildly from the hall. Behind her she heard the amazed voice of her father and she understood the pain that Hagen suffered as he cried, "Sister—little sister." But she could not stop. If she stayed she would burst into wild weeping—she would cry aloud her fears of Brynhild. At the door she ran blindly into Gunther who had just reached the castle, a weary and broken figure.

"What have you done, Gunther?" Gudrun sobbed—"What woe have you brought to Burgundy?"



It was night outside the castle. Within the halls strange shadows curvetted and danced as torches flared. Somewhere a minstrel sang—a haunting tune of love. High in a dim tower room, Gudrun lay on her couch, covered with a robe of turquoise blue, her soft curls buried in the golden pillows she leaned against. She looked very young and very sorrowful. At the window gazing out into the midnight blue of the heavens, stood Siegfried.

There was a long silence. And Gudrun thought: "I have lost him now—my tears that I cannot check have sent him away from me. He loves rather that super-woman who does not weep." Suddenly she

heard him speak—and her heart beat so loudly she could scarcely listen.

"Silly little princess—why do you weep? You who are as beautiful as a flower. You who should be as happy as a bird. Wherever your golden feet have danced, love has followed them. There is the love of an old king. It covers you like the warm rays of a faithful lamp. There is the love of your three brothers,—Gunther's like a blessing, Guttorm's like a gift, and Hagen's, so great it must contain painful things as well as happy ones. There is the love that Horned Siegfried bears you. It has called forth everything that is gentle in him—every tenderness he has ever known. Let us think no more of Brynhild the exultant. She lives not in the same realm as we do, my Gudrun. Her very strength is her weakness. Some time she may need our love more than you do in your frailty."

Gudrun lay quietly. She did not understand what Siegfried was saying. But it soothed her—as pleasant words always soothed her. She was beautiful, he had said. She must needs be happy because so many hearts loved her. Perhaps the world was good to her after all.

"Ah, then—I will try not to weep," she said softly. "But there is ever a fearfulness within me, Siegfried. When I am glad—I must keep from being too happy lest some disaster come upon me. Even now, Siegfried, in the midst of reassurance, a doubt worries me."

"And what is that doubt," Siegfried said to her

laughingly. "Come, little sorrow-searcher—what do you fear now?"

With the air of a child who has seen a trinket she longs to have, yet fears to take, Gudrun drew forth the ring of Andvari from under the turquoise coverlet. "I found it in your tunic pocket," she said. Siegfried started with an exclamation, and then, seeing her fright, took the ring and said:

"Listen, and I will tell you its story."

He told it all—glad to have the burden off his mind. He described its history of hate and of misfortune. He told her how he had given the ring to Brynhild long before—defying its curse, and how now it was returned to him—still bearing that curse.

"Hide the ring, little princess," he said. "It can do no good to anyone, and should Brynhild ever discover that I had helped Gunther woo her and that it was I who removed this sign of power from her finger, she would never forgive any of us."

Gudrun was proud to have Siegfried's confidence. She took the ring and hid it safely away. It was her secret shared with the noble Viking.

"And now—you will be happy?" Siegfried teased her, rumpling her short silky hair and looking deep into her grave eyes. "Promise me, Gudrun, that there will be room for the four of us at Giuki's court—Gunther and Brynhild, Siegfried and Gudrun.

She almost yielded—but there was still something that kept her apart from him.

"Tell me, Siegfried—how could you forget your

pledge to Brynhild? How did you come to ask my father for my hand?"

Then Siegfried could not bear to tell her of Grimhild's treacherous mead. He knew that she would never believe in him again if she learned that he had loved her only after he had seen her through a magic glass of gold.

"Trust me, Gudrun—that is all that I can tell you," he said.

Then the Northman left her. He had small hope that she would be happy for long. Gudrun was one who had been destined to unhappiness. It was strange, thought Siegfried, how strong a person must be to know serenity. He remembered his own happiness—far back in the days when he roamed the forest and later when he had known the sheer joy of conquering. He vowed that he would keep his spirit of gladness no matter what happened. Life was very beautiful—and there was a deeper radiance after sorrow had gone its way.

Chapter XXIV

THE RING OF ANDVARI

THE roses in Gudrun's garden blossomed and faded and came to second blooming. The fields of grain turned golden and were cut down. Southward the shiny green of the forest was changed to russet brown. Dead leaves fell. A chilliness was in the air when the sun had set each night. So came the harvest time.

There was peace in Burgundy and yet there was an air of unrest as if men waited for something. The superstitious stole very often to the temples. Those possessed of a wandering spirit found they could not stay in the city and took themselves off to far-away kingdoms.

Clouds pressed low over the earth. At the court of Giuki a heavy sense of gloom pervaded the halls so that the minstrels ended their songs in silence. The whisperings of malicious gossip swept the court and travelled far beyond the castle walls. The entire populace soon knew all the secrets of the lives of their noblemen.

There was no housewife of Burgundy who had not heard of the strange conduct of Brynhild, the wife of Gunther. How she had ordered the portals of the castle swung apart on many a moonlit night and had

gone unattended out into the world of darkness. Certain shepherds claimed to have seen her wandering on the hillsides near their flocks of snowy sheep. The king's guards told of her hurrying through the gates with her dark robes sweeping behind her like wings. They told of a rushing sound in the air as the lonely Valkyrie walked on the earth and lifted her arms to the sky. And children awoke from their sleep, crying they had heard a new bird's song in the night:

"Hojotoho! Hojotoho!
Heiaha! Heiaha!"

It was also told that each night in the tower room overlooking the garden of roses, the fair head of a woman shone at the casement in the moon's light, and the sound of her gentle sobbing was heard in the courtyard below.

The minstrels who sat in the hall of kings saw Hagen, the grim-hearted, become wiser each day. They heard him boast that whatever came to pass would not surprise him for the Norns had prophesied it. At the same time, the singers saw Gunther grow older and more troubled. Only Siegfried continued to look at the world with calm eyes and an untroubled countenance. Sometimes there was an expression of sympathy in his face that seemed born of a complete understanding. The minstrels imagined that Odin, the Allfather, of whom they sang, understood all humans as Siegfried understood the men of Burgundy.

But there were certain things that the outside world did not know. How Gudrun who hated unhappiness

in others, clung to Siegfried asking: "Why has Brynhild's joy departed? She walks like a woman of loneliness and she listens with the look of one lost in a dream."

"I do not know," Siegfried answered, a momentary sadness in his eyes.

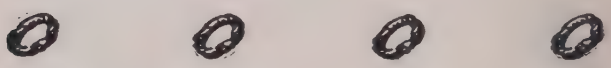
"But why does she not love life when she has wealth and beauty and the praise of all mankind, as well as my dearest brother to call her own?" cried Gudrun.

"Perhaps she sorrows because she can never ride with the Valkyries again," said Siegfried.

"Nay—but I do not believe it. I think that it concerns you, Siegfried. She looks at you so strangely. I shall ask her—I shall most certainly ask her," cried Gudrun.

"That I must beg you not to do," said Siegfried sternly. "You will rue your words, my child, for Brynhild is stronger than you are and should she see some truth that lies beyond your understanding, she will not hold it from you. You will be hurt needlessly."

"And that would be good for me," teased Gudrun.



But this time Siegfried did not smile,

So Gudrun pretended to forget. But jealousy tormented her. She was curious to know more of Brynhild.

The sight of Gudrun brought painful remembrances

to the Valkyrie. When she saw Gudrun's golden hair that fit her head like a shining cap and the golden sandles upon her feet, she remembered that time when the little princess had come to Hlymdale to ask the Valkyrie to read a dream. Now that dream had come to pass—and it was still hard for Brynhild to believe it was so.

There came a day when Gudrun and Brynhild sat in the tower room together and talked as one woman to another. It was a new experience for Brynhild. The Valkyries had always been afraid to be intimate with her. She remembered hearing the gay chatter of Hrist and Mist, and wondering what it was they found to be so merry about. Now—Gudrun talked—in that same breathless intense way about unimportant trifles. Brynhild found it very delightful. Gudrun stood on tiptoe, looking out of the window.

"What do you think of those splendid new hats the guards are wearing," she said, "aren't they like strutting cocks though—how is it my father can always manage to make all his guards strut, I wonder?"

Brynhild came slowly over to the window and looked out. Yes—it was true—what Gudrun had said about the guards. But she would never have thought of it herself. She tried to imagine what she would have seen if she had looked out of the window—perhaps the sky like an opal, and the air filled with drifting golden haze because it was a warm autumn day.

"Brynhild—what did you really think when you found you could never ride with the Valkyries again?

Weren't you excited at the thought of being a mortal for awhile?" Gudrun's voice continued aimlessly.

How incredibly her words hurt. Brynhild felt the shock of them—wounding her unbearably. She struggled to keep calm. So this was what women did to each other!

"Your roses—Gudrun—have you ever seen anything so perfect?" Brynhild's eyes sought the refuge of the open window again. She did not want Gudrun to look at her.

"How strangely you look at the roses, Brynhild—rather like the way in which you look at Siegfried. Tell me—why do you look at Siegfried so unhappily?"

Gudrun trembled at what she had said. Siegfried had told her not to speak of this thing. She was frightened when she looked at Brynhild. The Valkyrie had whirled from the window and stood with her proud head leaning back against the stone wall. Her hair glowed more coppery than ever before against the parchment of her face. When she opened her eyes, Gudrun saw they were black instead of grey.

"You have asked me that with evil intent, Gudrun, for you have a cruel heart," Brynhild's words came stiffly from her lips.

"What do you mean, Brynhild?" Gudrun was sorry now—sorry for what she had said. She held out her slender hands to embrace Brynhild—tears filled her soft eyes as she saw the strange look she had brought to the face of the Valkyrie.

"You would hurt—and hurt again, little princess.

You are not content with your own happiness—you must insist upon the happiness of all who surround you. You wish your world to be a gentle peaceful land where everyone loves one another."

"Yes—that is what I wish," Gudrun said. "And that is why I asked you to tell me of your unhappiness."

"Ask such things as are good for you to know," Brynhild said wearily. "Matters that strong women may bear are not for you to hear."

Gudrun turned pale.

"What ever do you mean, Brynhild? Are there secrets kept from me because I am not strong enough to hear them? I do not believe it. Siegfried has no secrets from me."

Gudrun's words were filled with pride. She was thinking of the story of the wooing of Brynhild that Siegfried had told her. If he had shared so great a secret, what other would he keep hidden?

When Brynhild heard this childish boast, a tremendous fury filled her. She who had been hurt by the thoughtless words of another, rose now to her own defense.

"There is a secret that has been kept from you. It concerns Siegfried and yourself. How do you think, Gudrun, it came to pass that a son of the Volsungs, born of honor, should break his pledge with me and wed in Burgundy?"

"What are you saying? I will not listen to you. You are a wicked war-maid," cried Gudrun, covering her ears and turning to fly from the room.

Brynhild stopped her. She stood, barring the entrance of the tower-chamber and her words fell hotly upon Gudrun. Nothing could stop this wild onslaught of confession now that it had begun. All the brooding that had lingered in the proud heart of the Valkyrie was torn forth.

"Think you that Siegfried forgot Brynhild of his own self? Nay—nay—the world is not like that, little princess. Grimhild, your mother is the bane of all this. She was jealous of Hagen's love for you and wished to put you beyond his reach by giving you to another. So she mixed a drink of magic for Horned Siegfried. When he drank of it, all memory of Brynhild vanished and he saw you with eyes of love."

"Ah—but it is a lie—a lie without measure," sobbed Gudrun. "How do you know this thing?"

"I know this thing as I know all," Brynhild said bitterly, "the gods have thrown me away but they have not forgotten me. I am warned by the Valkyries—I am guarded by Heimdall—I am told all prophecies of the Norns."

Brynhild's words were so certain, Gudrun was forced to believe them. In the agony of her hurt, she cried out what she had sworn she would never tell:

"You do not know all things, Brynhild. There is something that no Valkyrie dares to breathe lest you destroy the bearer of the evil news. There is something that is magic and the Norns dare not tell of it, and Heimdall sees it has already come to pass so it will do little good to warn you now."

"You are pretending something—in order to hurt me further," Brynhild said coldly.

"No—no—I will tell you, and you will see that it had to be true," cried Gudrun.

"Tell me this thing. I do not fear your words, nothing further can hurt me," said Brynhild.

"Hear this then," cried Gudrun, "and see if it does not hurt. It was Siegfried himself who rode through the hedge of fire and slaked the flames so that Gunther might come to you. It was Siegfried who wore a tarn-cap that rendered him invisible, and guided Gunther's hand in the three games that he won from you. You have become the wife of a good man—but one who is neither stronger-bodied nor stronger-willed than you —and that was the boast you made known throughout the world."

Brynhild looked as if death had come to her. She was ashy grey and her eyes were empty of all life. In a flash she saw the explanation of all that had bewildered her at Hindfell. Gudrun had been right when she said this thing had to be believed. But the Valkyrie was a helm-maiden who had battled and defended herself for a lifetime. She roused herself to defend her pride at this last moment when no defense seemed possible.

"I will never believe it—" she said. "The ring of Andvari was taken from my finger by Gunther in the strife. It would not have yielded to him if Siegfried had done the battling."

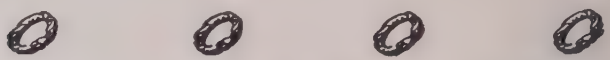
"And who do you think has the ring of Andvari?

—not Gunther at all—but Siegfried," Gudrun cried, beside herself with anger and hurt.

"If this thing is so, show me the ring," Brynhild whispered.

"Let me past the door and I will get it," Gudrun said. "Siegfried has given it to me to hide, saying it could do no good to anyone."

Brynhild hid her head as Gudrun ran from the room. Siegfried had been right—the accursed ring could do no good to anyone. When Gudrun returned with the gleaming gaud, Brynhild scarcely looked at it. She had known when she heard Gudrun's words, that they were the truth.



The Valkyrie lay as one dead. All Burgundy knew of her illness, yet none knew its cause, save the family of Giuki. When Gudrun had told all, she had rushed to her lord, throwing herself at the feet of Siegfried. She wept wildly—her golden head in his lap. His strong hands soothed her.

"What is it, my child—what has frightened you?" he comforted.

It was a long time before she could speak—and then she told him what she had done. She told him how Brynhild had hurt her first—and taken all her faith and trust away, and how afterwards she had betrayed the secret of Gunther's wooing to the Valkyrie.

When Siegfried heard this thing, he felt a great sadness come over him. He knew that the ring of

When Gudrun returned with the gleaming gaud, Brynhild scarcely looked at it, for she knew the words were true

Andvari had begun its mysterious spell. All who had touched it were marked with unhappiness. And Siegfried understood these things were beyond the power of mortals, so Gudrun must not be blamed for what she had done. He contented himself with saying gently: "There were things better left unsaid, little princess. This you have come to know this day."

And while Gudrun found comfort in Siegfried's kindness, Brynhild lay on her dais, white and silent with Gunther kneeling beside her.

"What is it—what new unhappiness is this?" cried Gunther in despair. Long had he endured the knowledge that the Valkyrie walked in sadness—but he could not endure this new suffering that had laid her low as in death. Long he pleaded with her before she spoke. At last her words came as if from a long way off, without bitterness, but cold with an edge of pain beyond her power to bear.

"I promised to wed the one who rode through flaming fire and conquered me at the games I ordained. And one came to me—seemingly he slaked the fiery hedge. I saw him with my own eyes throw a boulder into a sapphire pool when my own boulder lay on the pool's edge. I saw him spring through the air and pass over my head to a spot beyond me. I felt my shield shatter before his spear, and the ring that guarded me was taken from my hand. Now I have learned, Gunther, of the phantom one who was ever at your side, to bear the weight of your stone, to match the will of Brynhild. And I who swore I would wed him who

was stronger-bodied and stronger-willed than myself, find now I have broken my own vow. Ask you so great a thing as my forgiveness, Gunther, when you have wittingly done this thing to me?"

Then the good Gunther bowed his head, knowing he had no right to ask her to forgive. It was even as she had said—he had done the thing purposely that hurt her.

"Let me beg you only to be happy again," he said gently. "I will give you anything you desire. You may go back to Hindfell with your Valkyries. You may go to Hlymdale with your foster-father. The land of Burgundy will never imprison you."

But all that Brynhild said was: "Never again will you see me glad in your halls. I shall never speak a word of kindness, never drink nor feast, never wear fair robes of gold, never give good counsel. Here will I lie—a sorrowing heart—until Siegfried is made to pay for his deed."

Then pleaded Gunther for his foster-brother, his much-loved Siegfried.

"How can you blame him, fair Valkyrie. It was I who begged him to do this thing. You yourself have told Gudrun the reason he forgot his pledge to you. My mother's mead is the cause of your woe—not Siegfried—not Gudrun—not Gunther."

"Away—away," Brynhild moaned. "Blame not anyone save Siegfried," and even as she said this thing she knew its wrong. Siegfried had been betrayed into this dishonorable deed. It had been no fault of his.

Throughout the castle echoed the wailings of the Valkyrie. At times she could be heard, calling her sister helm-maidens, calling her old battle-cry:

"Hojotoho! Hojotoho!
Heiaha! Heiaha!"

At other times she was a woman—weeping, and the handmaidens who loved her, wept as well, saying that an evil day had come to Burgundy with such lamentation as this. And so the days passed and her grief showed no lull though Gunther pleaded with her and even Guttorm, who admired her, came shyly to her side with his young words of pity and love. She yielded not in her proud-willed way, but lay silent or weeping, without speaking to anyone.

Finally, Gudrun who forgot things easily, came to the door of Brynhild's chamber, ready to beg forgiveness and end the time of trouble.

"Brynhild—sister-queen, awake and mingle again with the children of Giuki who love you," said the gentle princess.

The proud Valkyrie lay with her burnished hair outspread and her pale hands at her side. She seemed to hear naught of what Gudrun said.

"Brynhild—let us all forgive each other. Let us defeat the ring of Andvari that strives to fill our lives with tragedy. Let Burgundy be a land of happiness again—with you and Gunther and Siegfried and me together."

For a long time Gudrun strove to rouse Brynhild. But never once did the Valkyrie answer nor give any

sign of hearing, and at last the little princess ran weeping from the room.

"Siegfried," she cried, "what have I done? She who was so beautiful lies like one who is dead. She who was so alive, does not speak nor give any sign of hearing. Go to her, Siegfried, perhaps you can give her comfort."

Then Siegfried went slowly to Brynhild. His head was bowed. At the door of her chamber, he stood for a moment watching her. She lay as if sleeping. If it had not been for the tortured expression on her face, she might have been that other sleeping Brynhild whom he had first found upon the mountain Hindfell.

"Cast away your grief," he said softly. "You are greater than grief."

"You dare to come to me," she answered.

"We are all under the spell of the ring," Siegfried said wearily. "Will you remember that and think less harshly of what has befallen you?"

"I will never forgive," Brynhild said.

"Gunther, the good knight, suffers even as you do," Siegfried said sternly. "No nobler men are there than the sons of Giuki. Be glad that you are the wife of so fine a man."

"There are none as great as Horned Siegfried who slew Fafnir and rode Greyfell ever to victory," she said bitterly.

Then Siegfried, the mighty, pleaded with her. "Ah —live and love, Brynhild. Love Gunther and me withal! Remember how long ago on the mountaintop

you told me we were not for each other. Then it was I who wept and raged and said that fate could not be so cruel. Then you were wise and knew that mortals cannot direct the ways of the gods. Yet now you strive bitterly to do that very thing."

"I will never forgive," Brynhild answered.

Then Siegfried went from her chamber. His heart swelled with grief. He stood alone in a great hall, his fists clenched, and his head bowed. For the first time in his life he knew defeat.

While in the tower-room, the sorrowing Brynhild at last stirred and returned to life. But she came back —with hate in her heart and a bitterness beyond anything she had ever known. Turning to Gunther, she said: "In the castle of Giuki there has been an interweaving of three lives. Death shall result. And this shall be Siegfried's death or my death by your hand. Even now Gudrun mocks me. Even now Burgundy laughs. Prepare to tell in a day's time, Gunther, what shall be your decision. Siegfried or Brynhild—Brynhild or Siegfried—must die."

Chapter XXV THE HUNT

NOW was Gunther torn between his love for Siegfried, his blood-brother, and for Brynhild, the exultant. All through the night that Brynhild had given him to make his decision, he paced the courtyard of the castle. "Siegfried or Brynhild —Brynhild or Siegfried"—he could hear the words of the Valkyrie echoing on every side. When the birds sang they sang of the terrible choice he must make, when the guards on the walls struck their swords against the stone with a clang, it was as if they ordered the young Burgundian to his deed.

How could he slay Siegfried? He remembered all their days of happiness together—how they had first encountered one another in the garden of roses, how Siegfried had saved Burgundy from the Danes and the Saxons, how they had traveled North-over-the-sea together. He thought of the love his sister bore the son of the Volsungs. No—a hundred times no—Siegfried must not die.

But then he must remember Brynhild, with her beautiful coppery hair and her true sea-grey eyes, with her splendid spirit and the strong tragic face he had grown to love so dearly. There had been much sorrow in her life. How bitter she was because she had been

sent away from Valhalla for all time. How her heart must ache when she heard the rushing sound of the helm-maidens riding through the clouds. What poor men mortals must seem to her beside the gods. Gunther longed more than anything in life to see peace come to her brooding mind. How could he slay Brynhild?

And yet she had said that his hand must strike down one of them—Siegfried or herself. Gunther knew that this was not the threat of an angry woman. Brynhild believed what she said. The young Burgundian covered his face with his hands and wished that he might weep. When dawn came, he had decided. Brynhild must not be the one to die.

In the pale light of morning, Hagen came that way, stopping to look scornfully at the bowed head of his brother.

"So the gloom of the ladies has influenced the men of Burgundy too," mocked the grim-hearted one as he passed by.

He continued his way again, but suddenly he heard Gunther's voice calling him.

"Hagen—I would speak with you."

Hagen came slowly to the stone bench where Gunther sat.

"What is it?" he said.

"Brynhild has ordered the death of Siegfried," Gunther said in a low voice.

Hagen's eyes gleamed from beneath his shaggy brows. Vengeance at last! Horned Siegfried who

had come among the Burgundians and captured their little princess would pay for this deed. Hagen's jealousy was like a madness, blinding him from the truth. As always he saw Siegfried in the light of a robber and nothing else.

"And you will slay him—how?" Hagen asked.

"I cannot slay him," Gunther moaned. "We swore blood-brothership beneath the garland of turf. Such an oath cannot be broken. I would kill myself rather than Siegfried."

"Then you wish—another to slay him?" Hagen said, with a curious light in his eyes.

"I wish—him to be slain," Gunther said.

Hagen thought for a moment. Then, reaching out his hand, he touched Gunther.

"Rouse yourself and listen to me. The son of the Volsungs shall die. He cannot live in happiness when he has caused so much sadness in our midst. Call a hunt for the morrow and I will arrange the rest. There have been many accidents on hunting expeditions, brother—wild boars can stab with their tusks as well as spears with their points. Many a hero who is clever enough to protect himself in battle, forgets to be cautious during the chase."

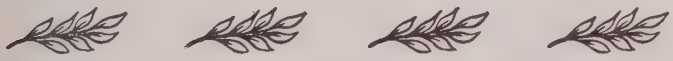
"But Siegfried has a horned skin that saves him," Gunther cried—grasping at one last hope that his foster-brother could not be killed.

"Invulnerable in every spot save one—the minstrels sing of a linden leaf that fell between his shoulders and kept that spot clean of the dragon's blood. Fear not,

Gunther, I will arrange everything—even to discovering the exact place where the Viking is vulnerable."

Gunther rose, and still with bent head, walked toward the castle.

"Do not forget," he heard Hagen's voice say clearly —"a hunt in the black forests starting at dawn of the morrow."



All day the castle rang with the preparations for the hunt. The pall of gloom that had hung over Burgundy since the coming of Brynhild, was lifted. Champions and knights rejoiced that Gunther had brought an end to grief and given them the right to enjoy themselves again. They polished their spears and sharpened their arrow-heads. The horses were made ready and the dogs chosen. Ahead of the hunting party that was to leave on the morrow, went the vassals with sumpters laden with fellowship bread and wine, meat and fish. A feast would be awaiting Gunther and his knights.

Those who listened for Brynhild's weeping, heard no sound. They were happy, thinking she had forgiven and that the hunt was Gunther's gesture of thankfulness. Only Gunther knew that the Valkyrie lay as if turned to stone, waiting for the deed of death she had ordered.

Siegfried glowed with high spirits. He hurried about the castle, giving orders for the preparations of the boar-spears, summoning the lads who took care of the horses for their last instructions, and rushing down

to the stables himself to see that Greyfell was fed and curried.

"Ah, my beauty—," he caressed the sensitive horse, "it is long since we rode for the sheer joy of one another's company. No fiery hedge, this time, my steed! No endless galley journey to torment you! But the cool woods and the sparkling streams, the thrill of barking dogs and hunted beasts,—ready, my good horse!"

While Siegfried went about his joyous tasks, Gudrun walked sadly in her rose garden. How she hated to be left alone. The world always seemed a frightening place when Siegfried was away. The endless masses of roses blurred through her tears. It was here that Hagen, the grim-hearted came to her. His eyes were feverish with restlessness. His plans were fully made for the morrow. As he saw his fair sister weeping in the garden, he felt relief and new fervor shake him. Fondly he remembered how happy Gudrun had been in the days when she had loved only her three brothers. Burgundy would see again their glad princess. The court of King Giuki would be as it had been before Horned Siegfried came that way.

"Do not weep, little sister," Hagen said.

"Ah, dear Hagen, I cannot help but weep. Somehow I fear this hunt tomorrow. Siegfried laughs at me, saying—how like a woman to find dread in the simplest event. I suppose I am very silly, but I cannot help being frightened."

Hagen's eyes glowed more intensely than ever. He

said craftily, "Nay—you are right to be afraid. It is a woman's instinct, I suppose."

"What do you mean, brother?" Gudrun's eyes were wide with anxiety, "what harm can come to Siegfried during a hunt?"

Then Hagen looked about him and saw that no one was near. He came close to Gudrun as if he were disclosing some valued secret.

"I will tell you the truth, little sister. Tomorrow is not really a hunt. The Saxons have broken their word and are marching toward Burgundy. We go to battle and not to sport. None know of this thing else all Burgundy would flee. The soldiers are tired of fighting and we fear they would desert our father in the time of need."

"Oh—Hagen—can this be the truth you tell?" Gudrun's trembling hands clung to her brother's arms. "There will be danger, then, for Siegfried?"

"No, not really," Hagen pretended to soothe her. "The Horned Siegfried is protected by his invulnerable skin. No weapon can pierce him."

"But there is one spot—where a linden leaf fell—there may he be wounded. It would be the way of fate to lead some spear-head to the very place," wept Gudrun.

"Ah—that is serious," Hagen said. "Tell me, Gudrun, would you like me to be Siegfried's guard. I will follow him on foot, on horse, wherever he goes, and keep ever between the vulnerable spot and any chance weapon."

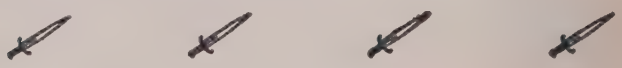
"Dear brother—I knew that you would help me," Gudrun wept softly, "ever you have taken care of me, since I was a small maid and feared to ride a horse or go sailing on the Rhine."

"But there must be some way for me to tell the exact spot," said Hagen slyly, "else how can I be sure that I am guarding him well."

"That is easy," she said with the imperious gesture of a woman attending to matters that man cannot possibly understand. "I will sew, with a fine scarlet silk, a secret cross upon his vesture. There between his shoulder blades, the bit of thread will mark the spot of fatality for Siegfried. There, dear Hagen, your hand must ever be near to guard my husband as he goes to battle."

"For this wise thought of yours, Gudrun, Siegfried will be saved," Hagen said. "Only this remember—no word of the war with the Saxons must be breathed—not even to Siegfried. Once before have you broken your word, little princess. You have seen what woe was caused by the telling of the secret of the ring. Guard your lips well this time. No one must suspect it is not a hunt we start upon tomorrow. Great trouble will befall us if it is discovered."

Gudrun promised this should be so. And Hagen, the betrayer of Siegfried, left her with the knowledge that a scarlet cross would mark the place where a sword's point must thrust.



At dawn the horns could be heard blowing throughout the city. From all sides the cohorts gathered. They might have been going to war save for the general air of comradeship and merriment that pervaded the company. Outside the walls of the castle, they awaited the coming of their princes.

In the courtyard of Giuki's household, the steeds pranced impatiently. First came Hagen, gloomy as ever, bearing a great spear which he studied from beneath his shaggy brows. He mounted a black charger and stood motionless, waiting for his brothers. Gunther and Guttorm came together. Guttorm was radiant in his youthful way.

"I had thought that all good sport was dead in Burgundy," he laughed, as he swung himself up on his chestnut horse. "Praise the gods for a good chance at hunting again. The baying of the hounds and the blowing of the horns make my blood tingle, in truth. Why aren't you gay, Gunther? It's a gay day and a gay venture lies before us."

Gunther smiled in answer but there was no happiness in his eyes. Once he looked toward Hagen as if he would speak, but he saw his brother shake his head imperceptibly so he turned away.

"Where is Siegfried?" several voices cried.

"Here he comes," the answer sounded, and the doors swung open for King Giuki and the Viking to come forth.

The King smiled upon his people. No one knew how much he rejoiced that life had returned to his

court. He made a splendid picture, standing in the pale light of the dawn—his royal robes gleaming with fine embroideries of gold and a jeweled staff in his hand. Beside him, Siegfried seemed like a strong young creature of the woods and the open. It had pleased him to think of another Forest on this day when he set forth to hunt in the woods of the Rhinelands. And so he had dressed himself as that Siegfried of old, with a tunic of skin and leggings of hide, and the sword Gram at his side. His golden-brown body gleamed in rugged beauty. Many glances of envy were cast upon him.

Just as the horns blew again, the note that summoned the hunters,—just as Siegfried turned to bid good-by to the King, the door was suddenly thrown wide again and they all turned to see the fragile figure of Gudrun standing there. Her golden hair was blown into a mass of curls and her long robe made her seem even smaller than she really was. She ran straight into Siegfried's arms, crying:

"Siegfried you must not go—stay from the hunting. I awoke from an evil dream. Two wild boars chased you across the heath and then the flowers grew red. Do not go, my dear lord."

Siegfried held her closely, saying tenderly: "Dear child, I will come back in a few short days. The hunt means the beginning of peace and kindness again in our land—and not the sorrow of new grief. Courage, my little princess."

"No—no, you must remain, Siegfried. I dreamed

how two mountains fell upon you. I could not find you again. You were gone from me."

"But here I am—and you have seen me again, after all," laughed Siegfried. Then drying her tears, he kissed her, saying: "Remember—a princess may not weep. Now I am off—hurry to the tower-room that I may see your shining hair from a long way as I turn to look for you. And remember these words to comfort you, my princess. Only the doomed shall die."

When Siegfried bent to kiss Gudrun, Hagen, the grim-hearted saw that a small piece of gleaming scarlet was marked on the skin tunic he wore.

And so the hunt began—forth from the courtyard of the King the horses galloped. The furious barking of the dogs,—the excited shouting of the men—the horns —ever-blowing—these were the sounds that reached Brynhild as she lay waiting for the doom of Siegfried.

Chapter XXVI

THE DEATH OF SIEGFRIED

AND now the hunters had reached the gloom-ridden woods. They galloped along dark aisles where the foliage arched above their heads to keep out the sun. They came to a halt before a stretch of glade which they decided should be the game-course. The hunting fellowship gathered in a circle and Gunther, the leader said:

"Who shall lead the chase and find the game within the wood?"

"Siegfried," came the shout from all sides.

But Hagen stepped forward, lifting his hand for silence. "Let us part," he said, "before we begin the chase. Thereby my lords, we may let the best hunter in our midst prove himself on this woodland venture. We will divide men and hounds and let each turn where he wishes. The best hunter will be made known by the game he slays."

This pleased the hunters, as it did Siegfried. There were ever more joy in a contest than in a simple chase. Siegfried cried merrily: "I need no dogs save one brach that is trained so he can tell the track of the beasts through the pine woods. We'll find the game!"

Then an old huntsman gave the Northman a good sleuth-hound and soon Siegfried was led to the lair of

the wild beasts. Whatever the brach started to attack, Siegfried slew with his own hand. Greyfell was so far ahead of the other huntsmen that Horned Siegfried reached the prey first in every case. And so he gained the prizes they all sought—slaying the mightiest of boars with his bare hands. Not content, he went deeper into the forest. He slew a bison and an elk, and four strong ure-oxen and a savage deer. Greyfell seemed to fly over the rough ground so that neither hart nor hind could escape.

At high-noon, Siegfried heard the calls of men and the loud blowing of horns and he rode toward the place where the hunters had made camp. Greyfell was hung with the bodies of game that Siegfried had slain. Only such a steed as this horse of Odin could have borne the burden.

When the Viking came riding to the glen where the Burgundians had gathered for their feasting, he was welcomed by loud cries of wonder. The dogs strained at their leashes—the baying of the hounds was a mournful cry of desire. The other hunters had captured a few boars but their combined game did not equal what Siegfried brought.

In the shouts of good-will, no one noticed that Hagen was silent. His plan to get Siegfried off by himself so that no one would see his slaying, had failed. Hagen, the grim-hearted had been no more able to keep up to Greyfell than the fleet deer in the forest. While the vassals made ready the fires to cook the game and those servants who had come ahead of the hunts-

men unpacked the baskets of wine, Hagen sat brooding over some way in which to outwit the clever and courageous Northman.

So the hunting fellowship tables were made ready. Rich viands were set before the goodly company. The dogs yelped joyfully at the bones that were tossed them. Laughingly the huntsmen joked: "By the end of another day's hunting, our hills and woods will be empty of wild beasts if Siegfried and Greyfell and Gram do not part company."

During the feast, Gunther fell silent. He had seen Hagen's brooding and knew that it boded little good for Siegfried. During the morning's hunt, the good prince had forgotten the evil the day held. As he ran with the packs to the sound of the gay horns, he had been happy. It had all seemed like the days before he and Siegfried had gone to the Northlands. But now that the excitement of the chase was stilled for awhile, fear gripped his heart again. He wondered what plan Hagen harbored in his grim mind.

Thus Gunther turned cold with foreboding when Hagen looked up after he had done feasting and addressed Siegfried thus:

"Well, Siegfried—now that you have won your place as champion huntsmen, do you care to try another contest?"

"You may always invite me to a game," laughed Siegfried. "What is it, Hagen? Name the sport."

"I have often been told that Gudrun's husband is the fastest runner in the land. I know a cool spring some

distance hence. I will race you to the spring—drink from it—and race you back to the glen. Men shall judge who outpaces the other."

"That suits my spirit well," laughed Siegfried, "and let us race with all our hunting garb on and our swords at our sides that the contest will have some hardship about it and not be a simple test of running," cried the Viking.

This was what Hagen wished—for there was need of a weapon beside the spring if his plan succeeded.

The men of Burgundy rejoiced in the sight of the two runners making ready for the start. What a day for sport, it was—and how great a man was Horned Siegfried! They had little doubt who would be the victor in the race.

Like two wild panthers, the runners leaped to the start. The Burgundians saw them run down the aisle between two rows of giant trees. Then as they were lost in the leafy glade, they caught a glimpse of Hagen falling behind. They smiled, knowing what the outcome of the race would be. Only Gunther did not join in their laughter. He sat with his head on his hands —in an attitude of listening.

Now in the forest, the race neared the half-way goal. Siegfried followed the track that Gunther had pointed out to him, running with the ease of a high-spirited and graceful colt. Behind him, he could hear the heavy breathing of Hagen. With the spring in sight, Siegfried spurted that he might drink first and be well on his way back before Hagen drank.

But when Siegfried bent his head to the cool gushing water, the taste of the icy stream was good and he tarried to drink a little longer, knowing the victory was his no matter if Hagen caught up with him. And thus he bent to the refreshing spring, careless and happy and unaware of the shadow that stood over him.

When Hagen came to the stream, he did not hesitate to do his cruel deed. Unsheathing his sword, he saw where the mark of scarlet thread gleamed on the skin tunic Siegfried wore, and unerringly plunged the sword's point in the spot where a linden leaf had once fallen.

There was a terrible cry in the glade where the spring flowed. There was a blinding ray of light and a tremendous shattering sound. Hagen stood transfixed! He saw Siegfried rear up from the stream with a wild look upon him. The Northman was suddenly bathed in a shaft of golden light like a flame. And before his eyes, the Burgundian saw a miracle take place. The sword Gram at Siegfried's side was touched by the shaft of sunny fire. It fell to the ground—shattered in two. Siegfried looked at it with understanding. Hagen heard him murmur as he fell by the stream: "Even as no man but the bravest man shall touch Gram, so the Wanderer shatters the sword as Siegfried dies."

Hagen turned and fled wildly—he ran as if a pack of hungry wolves pursued him. Fear beyond anything in the life of man, tortured him. As he left the glade, he heard the baying of hounds and the frightened cries

Unsheathing his sword, he saw where the mark of scarlet thread gleamed on the skin tunic Siegfried wore

of men as they rushed to see what had caused that unearthly sound beside the spring.

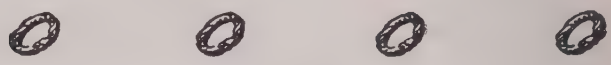
Siegfried lay among the flowers of Gudrun's dream —red flowers. He looked at Gunther who bent over him with peaceful eyes. The men of Bungundy huddled in groups near the two blood-brothers. They heard Gunther speak first: "Siegfried—what has happened? Brother, you are much hurt." Siegfried looked sadly at Gunther, and the Burgundian bowed his head.

"Siegfried—forgive. You know all that has come to pass. I cannot pretend before your clear gaze."

"Do not grieve, Gunther. The ring of Andvari had its way. And see—perhaps it was Odin's way as well. The sword Gram lies shattered at my side. Even so it was shattered once before when Siegmund, the brave Volsung, was called to death by the three Norns. This hour marks my summons to depart. I go with laughter as all warriors go. One favor alone I cry, Gunther. Take the shards of the sword back from whence they came. Sail North-over-the-sea to the court of Hjalprek. There Hjordis, the lovely, will wrap the cold steel in her scarf of silk and the broken blades of Gram will lie like a stiff spine in a yielding body until one who is brave and unafraid uncovers it. And this other thing, may I ask, good Gunther. That no one at the court of Giuki be told of Hagen's deed. Let little Gudrun think it was the thrust of a wild boar that killed Siegfried. Let the good King think it was an accident of the hunt. Even the jealous

Grimhild must live in ignorance of her son's deed. Promise me, Gunther, these things shall be so."

Gunther promised in a voice so low that none but Siegfried heard. There was a sudden gloom in the wood. All sunlight died. "Brynhild," Siegfried cried, "follow me—the Wanderer leads the way—you may walk with the gods again!"



Late that night, the hunt returned to Burgundy. The voices of men were stilled, but nothing could quiet the frenzied baying of the hounds. In the castle of Giuki, torches flared in the dark. A sense of disaster filled every heart. Why did the hunters return so soon? Some dread thing must have happened. Nearer and nearer came the sound of the dogs and the hurrying feet of men. The castle gates were flung wide—a crude wagon was driven through.

In the moonlit courtyard, the procession stopped. There was a clattering on the stones, a beating at the doors, and a cry for torches. In opposite towers of the castle, two women flung wide the casements. They looked down at the confusion below. At the same moment, they cried aloud—the torches had shown the pale face and the golden tossed hair of Siegfried. He lay on the rough cart as if he were asleep. And he did not answer their cry.

Suddenly, the silent huntsmen broke into a loud wailing. The baying hounds howled like ravening wolves. Horned Siegfried was dead.

Chapter XXVII THE DEATH FIRE

UNDER the open sky, a great pyre was raised. Here were the sturdy logs of the forest trees, the piled up faggots for the death fire. Siegfried lay upon them—as if he had stretched out on the earth beneath the soft clouds to rest. It had been decreed by King Giuki that the son of the Volsungs should be buried according to the way of the Northlands. Wearing the rough dress he had chosen for the hunt, he might have been that same sturdy son of the Forest Mimir had known. At his side were his possessions so that when the Valkyries carried him away, he would not go ill-attended and arrayed to Valhalla. The golden hauberk wrought by the clever Nibelungs gleamed and the fateful ring of Andvari shone in a silver casket. These things were from the great hoard that Siegfried had rightfully won from Fafnir.

Processions of people walked near to where the death-fire was to burn. They came—fearfully at first—for it seemed to them the ending of Siegfried had been ill-timed and they thought the gods had willed it so. When they saw the fair hero, they forgot their fear and wept softly. Their weeping sounded the day long—as ceaseless as rain falling. There was a sorrowful

murmuring throughout Burgundy as if a soft summer wind went crying about the roofs of the houses.

Night came, a drifting twilight that changed to a moonless darkness. Torchbearers surrounded the pyre and the face of Siegfried shone in the pale flickering light. There came to the pyre, Giuki, King of Burgundy followed by his sons and his daughter, Gudrun. And they wondered why Brynhild the exultant was not with the others, even as Gunther wondered why the Valkyrie wept on her couch at what had come to pass, since she had asked this thing.

Before the death-fire was lighted, Gudrun the wife of Siegfried and princess of the rose-garden, knelt at the pyre to lament the death of Siegfried. Men marvelled at what they saw. Gudrun drew near the pyre silently. She who had wept for the living, could not weep for the dead. The watchers saw that she did not sigh nor smite her hands against her breast as other sorrowing women were wont to do. The weeping of Gudrun was hushed by the shock of the dread thing that had come to her. Great-hearted queens of the court came forward to comfort her, telling her of their griefs. Spoke the beautiful widow Giaflaug:

"Lo, upon earth I live most loveless. Weep that your heart may not break."

But Gudrun was still silent.

Then spoke Herborg, a queen of Hunland:

"A crueller tale I have to tell of my seven sons and the eighth man, my mate, who were felled by a death-mead in the southlands. Alone must I sing over them,

alone must I array them, alone must my hands deal with their departing. And all this was in one season's wearing. There was none left to solace me."

But Gudrun, dreadful-hearted as she looked at Siegfried lying dead, could not weep.

Then suddenly, Gudrun looked up to see Brynhild standing in the shadow. There was the look about her of a dream-woman, walking in mist. She was all radiance—her burnished hair, her luminous eyes of love, the silvery gleaming of her garments. When Gudrun saw her she knew that Brynhild was the one to lament, for the body of the Valkyrie seemed stricken with grief. But the princess who had kept him from Brynhild in life would not relinquish him now.

Bowing her head, Gudrun wept and sang her lament:

"Such was my Siegfried
Among the sons of Giuki,
As is the king leek
O'er the low grass waxing,
Or a bright stone
Strung on band,
Or a pearl of price
On a prince's brow.

"Once was I counted
By the king's warriors
Higher than any
Of Herjan's mays;

Now am I as little
As the leaf may be,
Amid wind-swept wood
Now when dead he lieth.

"Ah, in the days by-gone
Great mirth in the homefield
When my Siegfried
Set saddle on Greyfell,
And they went their ways
For the wooing of Brynhild!
An ill day, an ill woman,
And most ill hap!"

At that moment the torch-bearers swept their brands down to the faggots of the pyre. There was a burst of great flame. As the people watched—stunned into silence—as Gudrun drew back from the fire, scorched by its heat—there came a tremendous pounding of horse's hoofs. The watchers looked with frightened eyes to see what bold steed rode on hallowed ground.

Out of the night galloped Greyfell, a rider upon his back. The rider sang a song as the wind blew her burnished hair and her silvery garments. Brynhild, the Valkyrie, rode to her slain hero. If she could not ride as a sky-maid, she would ride as an earth-maid. She would ride with Siegfried to Valhalla!

They saw the fearless Greyfell plunge straightway into the death-fire. For a moment the flames seemed to part as if they dared not touch Brynhild, the

glorious. And then there was a high-flung peak of fire that seemed to ascend high up into the sky. It burned with a dull roaring.

The men of Burgundy stood awed by the sight. Gudrun, the daughter of Giuki, remembered the look of Brynhild as she rode to join Siegfried. She had worn an expression of joyous courage and deep-abiding love. Gunther remembered the look of the horse Greyfell—the quivering nostrils, the high-prancing feet. It had been the picture of a horse riding to victory.

At last the Burgundians heard the sound they had been waiting for—the rushing of the Valkyries. And they saw the phantom shapes of high-helmeted maidens come riding with blood dripping from their spear-points and ravens crying about their heads. And a great wailing and weeping arose among the people for the passing of Horned Siegfried and Brynhild the exultant. A long sorrowing echoed the cry of the Valkyries as they rode out of sight bearing the doomed ones: *"Hojotoho! Hojotoho! Heiaha! Heiaha! Heiaha!"*

Chapter XXVIII

NORTH-OVER-THE-SEA

NORTH-OVER-THE-SEA sailed a dragon ship, bearing the shards of the sword Gram. No matter how wildly the wind blew and the waves tossed, the ship held its course. It fared where mountains of ice rose out of the sea, and a Forest loomed at the world's end. And though the vessel was nearly broken by the force of the storm, no chapman knelt in prayer on its decks and no oarsman cried out to the gods. Those who sailed the ship that carried the sword of the Volsungs back to the Northlands knew they would reach their port, for a One-Eyed Wanderer guided their way.

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